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HEAVY HAND, THE RELENTLESS; Or, THE MARKED MEN OF PARADISE GULCH.

BY CAPTAIN MARK WILTON,

AUTHOR OF "CACTUS JACK," "DON SOMBRERO," "LADY JAGUAR," "THE SCORPION BROTHERS," "CANYON DAVE," ETC., ETC.



THE WOMAN'S BLOOD SEEMED TO GROW COLD AS SHE SAW THE BIG DANITE'S KNIFE ABOUT TO PIERCE HER DEFENDER'S BODY.

Heavy Hand, the Relentless;

OR,

The Marked Men of Paradise Gulch.

BY CAPTAIN MARK WILTON,

AUTHOR OF "LIGHTNING BOLT," "IRON ARMED ABE," "LEOPARD LUKE," "HORSESHOE HANK," "CACTUS JACK," "STONE-FIST," "LONG-HAIRED MAX," ETC., ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

SETTING THE TRAP.

"PERCY BROOKE, you are a coward!"

The words were spoken banteringly, rather than contemptuously, and in that Western land it was just as well to utter them thus if at all, for it was the fashion of the time and place to resent all intended insults with knife and revolver.

Numerous tragedies are on record as having occurred there, and that Paradise Gulch, Utah, was no better than the average Western town will be shown anon.

"What can I do, Hughson?" was the weak reply.

"What can you do? What does any man of nerve do when he has a rival? Remove him! Now, the case is this; you love your cousin, Lillian Allen, but Locke Kellogg seems to have the inside track. Decidedly so! Well, what of it? Were you in the East, it would be well to submit, but here—nonsense! Say the word, and all Paradise Gulch and Elder Lockdale's power is at your back."

"But to do that, I must accept the aid of the Mormons, and, in a measure, place myself in their power."

"How in their power? What do you suppose they want of you?"

There was a slight emphasis on the last word, as though Percy Brooke was a person of no importance, whatever, and his face flushed a trifle. He was a handsome young fellow, but his face was weak and irresolute, and in the hands of the man who sat opposite him—iron-willed John Hughson—he was as plastic as wax.

"I don't know," he aimlessly replied.

"Of course you don't; they want nothing of you. Now, see here, Brooke, I am not a full-fledged Mormon, but, as you know, I stand high with Elder Lockdale, and what I say goes undisputed. I am useful to the worthy elder. Such being the case, I can help you."

"How?"

"Paradise Gulch is a paradise for those who go with the powers that be. Lockdale was originally located in Salt Lake City, but he found the rulers there too conservative—too tender with the Gentiles—and he struck out for himself and founded Paradise Gulch. Here, he is an absolute monarch; he has even cast off all allegiance to Brigham Young; and this town is to-day as distinct from all others as though none other claimed to be devoted to Mormonism."

"I know all that," Brooke answered, "but I fail to see what you are coming to."

"You shall see shortly. What I wish to impress on your mind is the fact that Lockdale can act for himself, and ask no odds of any one. He does act for himself, and a man may as well be dead as to incur his enmity. Now, I have only to say the word and your rival goes out of the way forever."

"But would Lockdale go so far as—"

"He goes to all lengths. For what other purpose are Barwolf and his Danites?"

Brooke shivered. He knew something about Elder Lockdale's secret agents, the destroying Danites, and it was not the first time their name had chilled him.

"I understand all this, but will he devote the Danites to my service?"

"He will, at my request, and whom the Danites mark is doomed. The mystic league is all-powerful. Great is their power, strong their grip and deadly their wrath. Say but the word, and Locke Kellogg is doomed as surely as the sun rises on the morrow."

For a moment Brooke hesitated; it was not in his weak nature to plunge boldly into the Rubicon; he would go a step at a time, and shiver as he went.

"So be it," he finally answered; "but I beg that you will not betray my share in the work to any one."

"Rest easy on that score, my dear Percy. You shall see how faithful I can be. Wait a few hours and then you shall learn that Kellogg is out of your way. Harrod shall take his trail at once."

Not many words more passed between the men, but they separated and each went his way.

"Now for Elder Lockdale!" said Hughson.

Paradise Gulch was one of the foremost of Mormon towns in Utah, yet it was not recognized by any of the rulers at Salt Lake City. Asa Lockdale, its great man, had once been one

of Brigham Young's chosen followers, but he had been an advocate of a positive and hostile policy, and had committed some indiscretions which caused him to fall into ill-repute at the chief Mormon city.

Then it was that he conceived his plan of a city where he would be absolute ruler. Going south of Utah Lake, he selected a site on the western slope of the Wahsatch Mountains and founded Paradise Gulch.

From that time he had his fill of power, so far as it went. The only thing that troubled him was the fact that his young town was small. To remove this objection he bent every nerve to add to its population, and as he was shrewd and practical, Paradise Gulch grew apace.

The means he used were so questionable, however, and so injurious to the cause of Mormonism, that he soon found himself expelled by the chief rulers of the so-called church. He made no resistance; he cared nothing for Brigham Young, nor the church, nor anything except his own power and gain.

As long as he could rule at Paradise Gulch he was content.

Rule he did, and that, too, with a relentless hand, though always under cover of a plausible explanation. About him he had a band of secret agents, or Danites, who were commanded by a man known simply as Barwolf. They obeyed him in all things, and when a man fell under Lockdale's ban, and mysteriously disappeared, people at large explained it in six words:

"The Danites have been at work!"

It was to meet this dark ruler that John Hughson was now going. Hughson himself occupied a position in Paradise Gulch which may be represented by the letter x —the algebraic sign of an unknown quantity, so far as the common people knew. Whether he was Mormon or Gentile, no one could say. He had not a plurality of wives; so far as was known, he had no wife at all. It was not known that he attended any church or state meetings, yet he often called on Elder Lockdale and seemed to be his friend, if nothing more.

Some one had called Hughson "an uncrowned prime minister," and the expression seemed apt. At any rate, he was powerful, and no one dared offend him. Had it been done, the offender would soon have expected to see Barwolf and the Danites upon his track.

Hughson, after leaving Percy Brooke, went at once to Elder Lockdale's house. It was a spacious building, for the elder had a large and growing family, and there were peculiarities which will be described later. At present they may go unmentioned.

The visitor had no trouble in gaining audience with the elder; he never had such ill-luck when he applied. He entered Lockdale's private room, and found him with two other men.

One was Barwolf, the Danite chief. He was a tall, powerfully-made man, with a square, strong, soldierly face, which, however, was not prepossessing. He looked cruel and stern—a man to fear and avoid. His face and form were impressive, however, and when one thought of his calling and his chosen name, it almost seemed as though he should be clad in armor and known as a Roman centurion.

The second person was a man who would attract yet more attention, but he was wholly unlike Barwolf. In height, he was about five feet and eight inches, and very slenderly built. Looking at his narrow chest, thin face and almost womanish hands, one would have said, at first sight, he had neither physical strength nor endurance; but a second glance would show that the chest was well developed, the whole body round and compact, and the wrists above the slender hands large and round.

If tested in a struggle, he would be found no mean foe.

His head was small, and had it not been for the high, broad forehead, would have been insignificant. His hair was jet-black, long, and as straight as that of an Indian. His face was as smooth as a woman's, and of a peculiar hue, like, and yet unlike, that of people with a trace of negro blood. It was a peculiar face, one at which men could gaze long and wonderingly, and, once seen, never to be forgotten.

His eyes somehow reminded one of black velvet. They were of an ebony color, large, and shaded by long, black lashes. In repose, their expression was calm, steady, and yet somber. No one could read them, nor their owner's thoughts. He was a mystery to all, even to the elder.

Yet the man was Harrod, one of Lockdale's most valued followers. He was known as the spy of the Danites, and was, if possible, more feared by those who did not love the elder's regime, than even Barwolf.

As Hughson entered, the elder made a gesture and his men went out silently. Harrod glided with a light, pantherial step; Barwolf stalked away like a gladiator.

The visitor and Lockdale were alone.

The Mormon elder was a man of nearly fifty years. He was a tall, spare man, with a clean-shaven, severe face. He looked not unlike an early Puritan, but his expression was cruel, treacherous and forbidding.

Something like animation appeared on his face, however, as he turned to Hughson.

"Well?" he questioned, tersely.

"All is well," the visitor serenely answered, as he took a lounging position in a chair. "I have seen Brooke."

"Well?"

"He accepts my offer. He will deliver Kellogg into our hands. He did not seem to see that his part would be a mere farce; I had not miscalculated his weak nature. He consents, and when it is done he will be in our power. As I thought, he is desperately anxious to win Lillian Allen."

"Let the fool dream on!" said Lockdale, contemptuously. "He is useful to us, and when all is ready, Edna Brooke comes to my harem, and the fair Lillian shall be yours."

"Exactly," Hughson agreed.

"The Brooke family is doomed," the elder continued, "and I will make the elder man crouch like a dog at my feet. I will show him I am ruler of Paradise Gulch."

"There is nothing to prevent."

"One man we must watch closely. Roger Hobart is no fool, and he loves Edna Brooke. I would set the Danites upon him at once, and so remove a dangerous man, but it is not a part of my plan. He must live to see me triumph; live to see his own plans forever ruined."

The elder spoke loudly and harshly, and his hand worked on the arm of his chair as though he had the heart of an enemy in his grasp.

"You hate him deeply," said Hughson, curiously.

"I do."

"May I ask the reason?"

"You may, but I shall not tell. The secret is mine, alone—unless Hobart suspects a certain thing, which is not probable. He is coming to the Gulch, however, and may soon know."

"Well, my dear elder, you need have no fear as to the result. Within a day or two at the most Percy Brooke will be in our power, and then we shall have a means of knowing the acts, words, almost the thoughts, of the Brooke family."

"You have done well, Hughson, and you shall not go unrewarded. The Mormons who follow Brigham Young sneer at the city of Paradise Gulch, but the day will come when my friendship will be no mean thing; the day will come when I shall rule all the Mormons. That is my ambition."

"A worthy one, and I wish you all possible success," Hughson replied.

CHAPTER II.

A MYSTERIOUS DEED—THE BROOKE FAMILY.

HUGHSON remained for half an hour with the plotting elder, and then went about his business. When he was gone, Lockdale summoned Barwolf again.

"Captain," he said, "I have work for you to do."

"Name it," Barwolf impassively replied.

"I am thinking of taking another wife."

"Quite right, sir."

"And of disposing of one of my present ones."

There was a slight sound at one of the half-open doors, but neither man heeded it. Had they looked closer they might have seen a woman standing there, half-concealed, watching the elder's face anxiously, one hand pressed over her heart, the other resting on the casing of the door as though she needed support for her limbs which had trembled at the ruler's words.

But they knew nothing of this.

"Right, again," the Danite answered.

"One of my wives has grown odious to me," Lockdale pursued. "She has always been melancholy and sullen; a regular fountain of tears. As a result, she has faded from a charming blonde to a bleached lily, or something of the sort. I am tired of her lamenting and wailing, and I desire to be rid of her. Give one of your best men the work, and let it be done quickly, quietly, thoroughly."

"I will send Rudolph."

"Very good."

"Which is the woman?"

"Number One."

"Ah, Heaven!"

The two words fell from the lips of the listening woman gaspingly. It was well they were no louder, or she would have betrayed her presence. She reeled dizzily, brushed one hand across her eyes, and then turned and fled lightly down the hall beyond.

She was Number One, and she had just heard the sentence of death pronounced upon her. Worst of all, she was helpless to avert the danger. Escape from the elder's house was impossible; she had attempted it often before that day, but always but to fail.

Now, she hurried to her room and locked the door behind her. It was little protection, for there was another key which, of course, would be given to the selected assassin, and she began to barricade the door with furniture. Her manner was wild, excited, almost frenzied.

She was yet young, but little past thirty, but she looked far older. Traces of beauty were yet visible, but, as the elder had said, she was faded. More than that, she was broken-hearted.

Asa Lockdale knew how to torture both body and mind, and as she had for some time been under his displeasure, she had been made to feel its full force.

At last he had doomed her to death. Before this hour she had felt that death would be a relief, but she had no desire to yield her life at an assassin's hands. The mere thought terrified her.

She had fortified her room as much as was possible, but she knew it would do no lasting good. She was wholly helpless, and her weak resistance was rather of the body than mind.

Having done what she could, she dropped upon her knees.

"Protect me, oh Heaven!" she breathed. "Help me in this, the hour of my adversity. Ha! what was that—an assassin's step?"

She listened with wildly-palpating heart. Yes, it was a step outside the room, and a key grated in the lock of the door.

In the mean while Barwolf had gone to the guard-room, so called, where more or less of the Danites were always on duty, and had given his message to Rudolph, a stout ruffian, who went to execute it as calmly as though death was but a trivial affair.

Barwolf awaited his return. Five, ten, twenty minutes passed. It was time for Rudolph to return, but he came not. Half an hour—three-quarters—his prolonged absence began to be mysterious. The Danite captain quickly arose and walked toward the private part of the house.

He knew the room occupied by Number One, and he was not long in reaching it. The hall was dark, and as he neared the door he stumbled over something and nearly fell. A suspicion crossed his mind, and he drew the slide of a dark-lantern he carried at his belt.

The light streamed out and fell upon that over which he had tripped. It revealed the body of a human being, but not that of wife Number One, as he had expected.

Instead, he looked into the white, still face of Rudolph.

At first he could not believe anything serious had happened, for the eyes looked up into his own, but further survey showed a wildness about them, and a pallor about the face, which spoke plainer than words.

Rudolph was dead!

Barwolf was amazed, and for awhile he was incapable of motion. Then he aroused and laid his hand on the door of the room occupied by Number One. It was locked, but the key he had given his subordinate was in the keyhole, and he quickly turned it.

The door receded and he had a view of the interior of the room. It was in confusion, the table and chairs being scattered all about, but the doomed wife was not visible. A hasty search satisfied the Danite she was not there, and then he went outside again.

A small, red pool beside the dead bravo told partially how he had died, but Barwolf did not stop to investigate further then. It seemed clear that the tables had in some way been turned on his follower, though it was strange a woman had overpowered him.

The chief aroused his other men who were in the house and directed them to search thoroughly. The order was obeyed, and all places examined except the rooms occupied by the elder's other wives, but Number One was not found.

As a last resort Barwolf went to Lockdale and told him the woman must have found shelter with some of her rivals for the elder's affection. The latter was very angry and at once produced his keys; the search was continued and made thorough, but its result was surprising.

The woman was nowhere to be found.

Lockdale and his officer looked blankly at each other.

"Where can she be?" Barwolf asked.

"I don't know," was the blank reply.

"She can't be in the house."

"How can she have left it?"

"She may have had aid."

"Who would dare to aid her?"

The elder spoke angrily, and his expression showed that he would deal severely, to say the least, with any one he proved guilty of having conspired against him.

Barwolf did not answer at once, but, after a short pause devoted to meditation, he walked to Rudolph's body. Opening the garments which covered his still breast, the chief looked for the wound which had taken his follower's life.

He found it easily—a small, deep cut directly over and through the heart, which had plainly been made with a slender-bladed knife.

The Danite looked at his master, and Lockdale saw a strange expression on his face.

"Well, what do you make of it?"

"I have a suspicion."

"Speak it!" the elder impatiently said.

"I believe this was the work of Heavy Hand!"

"Heavy Hand!" Lockdale contemptuously repeated.

"Yes, sir."

"Do you still persist in that bugbear?"

"I persist in the belief that the numerous mysterious deaths our band has experienced

in the last few weeks are the work of one man. All have died alike, by a knife with a narrow blade. No one has seen them fall; no one has seen the assassin, and all is clouded in mystery; but we of the band have come to regard this slayer as a person to be feared, because of the secrecy and deadly accuracy with which he does his work. We call him Heavy Hand, and I believe it was he who killed Rudolph."

The Danite spoke earnestly, and by the way in which he grouped all the facts of the case, succeeded in making something of an impression.

Lockdale's face became more serious and sober.

"But why should he take the woman away?"

"I believe he has a grudge against our band, and it may also extend to you. Hence, the attack."

"But how could he enter and leave unseen?"

"Now you ask more than I can tell."

"If your theory is right, he must have more than human powers."

"I am not sure but he has."

"Bah!" cried the elder, suddenly arousing,

"I will not believe in any such thing, nor that all the slain Danites owe their taking off to one person. Not I! We will speak of it no more. But the disappearance of this woman demands our immediate attention. Put all your men on the track and let her be recaptured at once. Bid Harrod use his skill; this is just the work for him."

Barwolf promised to faithfully obey and then hurried away, but the shadow still clung to his face, and as he went he muttered to himself:

"This work is of the same piece as the others, and the secrecy with which the murders are done perplexes me. Who, and what, is Heavy Hand?"

One of the residents of Paradise Gulch was Wallace Brooke, a man of sixty years, whose family consisted of himself, his son, Percy; his daughter, Edna, and his orphan niece, Lillian Allen.

The elder Brooke was a "Gentile," in the fullest sense of the word, yet he was a merchant of the Utah town. He had come among the Mormons ten years before, and first engaged in business in a place near Ogden City. There he had been financially successful, and had never had trouble with the Mormons, but the town lost its prosperity and Brooke looked about for a new base.

Unluckily, he chose Paradise Gulch. His opening promised well, for Lockdale bade him welcome, but he did not know that the elder first ordered Barwolf to remove him, and then rescinded the order when he had seen Edna.

For awhile all went well and Brooke was satisfied, but the weeks just preceding our story had caused him to have grave doubts. He noticed Lockdale's evident fancy for Edna, and the climax came when the elder formally asked for her as an additional light to his harem.

Brooke managed to postpone a definite answer, and he was vainly trying to decide how to best avert the danger when, on the evening of our opening scenes, a new arrival put a new aspect on affairs.

The merchant had been aware that in Percy he did not possess a proper adviser. He did not suspect that the young man was given to evil courses, but he knew his nature was weak and vacillating, and ill-fitted for an emergency.

On this evening, however, a long-expected guest arrived in the person of Roger Hobart, who was Edna's accepted lover. Hobart was a man of good judgment, nerve and coolness. In former years he had traveled over the greater part of the West, but, of late, had been in business at Denver.

On his arrival he was cordially welcomed by all, save Percy, who had not returned, and the elder Brooke improved the first opportunity to talk with him privately, explaining the state of affairs.

Hobart did not show anger when he heard that Edna had another suitor. He felt sure of her, and, at twenty-five, he was practical and sensible beyond the average of men.

He did, however, look very grave.

"Now," concluded the merchant, "I wish to know what I had better do. Paradise Gulch is composed almost wholly of Mormons, Lockdale reigns supreme and it is said that he has a band of Danites of the old, traditional kind, who remove whoever offends him."

"I can well believe it, for I know something about Elder Lockdale myself," Hobart answered, quietly. "He is an inhuman wretch, to put it bluntly, and scruples at nothing. Had I known Paradise Gulch was his town, I should have advised you to leave long ago; now, I fear it is too late."

"Too late?"

"Perhaps I should say, too late to go openly. Having selected Edna for a victim, he would not permit her to go so easily."

"Then we must go secretly. This will necessitate the abandoning of my goods, but that weighs as nothing against Edna's safety."

"Are you sure you can go secretly?"

"What is to prevent?"

"Lockdale knows you are not a Mormon, and he must also be aware that you do not take kindly, to say the least, to his proposal. Such being the case, I believe he will expect you to flee, and will have his Danites watching to prevent it. Probably they are watching now."

Brooke's face grew even more serious and gloomy. He was not blessed with the health and vigor of his former years, and he felt weak and helpless in this crisis.

"What can we do?" he blankly asked.

"It seems I have arrived very opportunely," added Hobart. "I do not wish to raise unnecessary fears in your mind, but, as I have said before, this is not the first time I have heard of Asa Lockdale. He is a man who scruples at nothing. Exiled because of his crimes from the real realm of Mormonism, he is now at liberty to carry out all the villainy he wishes. You ask what we can do. At present, I know of nothing except to attempt escape."

"I place all in your hands."

"Where is Percy?"

"Somewhere in town. He will return shortly."

"We are but three, all told, with whom to oppose Lockdale and his assassins."

"We can depend on one more. Lillian has a lover here—Locke Kellogg—who is a brave and worthy young man. He can, and will, help us."

"We number four, then, with two young girls to defend. The odds are not so very great, as we have only a town against us. Seriously, it will be a hard fight. Lockdale is without mercy, and his captain, Barwolf, is a man hard to outwit."

"I see you know them well."

"Do I not?" Hobart bitterly exclaimed.

"Had it not been for them my life would have been a very different one, perhaps—but never mind."

"Here is another of Lockdale's favorites; perhaps you know him?" said the merchant, suddenly, as he pointed from the window.

Hobart looked, and he saw a slender, smooth-faced man, in sober black clothes. He was passing the house, but not by any motion did he betray the fact that he had a thought of the "Gentile" settler. His gaze was fixed on the ground, and his manner was as staid and vague as that of a nun.

"Who is he?" Hobart asked.

"A spy of the Danites, Harrod, by name. Remember him, for he is Lockdale's tool, and reputed very cunning. But here comes Percy; we will now take him into our conference."

Young Brooke had, indeed, returned at last, but his expression was not one to bring light to the darkened home; he, too, looked troubled and nervous.

CHAPTER III.

THE GRIP OF IRON.

ROGER HOBART had always been a favorite with all the Brooke household, but Percy did not seem pleased to see him on the present occasion. The young schemer, who had taken the first step on the road to ruin, would very much rather have found the house wholly untenanted. He had plans working which would not bear the light of day, and he feared Roger's clear eyes and keen judgment.

When he entered Lillian had been sitting at the window, and he greeted her even more warmly than usual, but she did not reciprocate with encouraging zeal.

She had discovered his fancy for her, as well as the fact that he disliked her chosen suitor, young Kellogg, and she found even her cousinly regard slipping away.

The elder Brooke at once sent for his son, and the latter joined him and Hobart in the front room. Greetings over, the merchant spoke, abruptly:

"We are going to leave Paradise Gulch, Percy."

The young man started.

"Leave the Gulch? How is that?"

"Elder Lockdale has proposed for Edna's hand, and we are satisfied her only safety now rests in getting at once beyond his power."

Percy did not answer at once. He was not so lost to human feeling that he heard with indifference that the elder coveted Edna, for whom he really cared, but he knew the presence of the family was desired in town by his new friends, the Mormons, and he scented trouble in the air.

His father proceeded to make the matter plain, and then said that they must at once take measures to leave the Gulch secretly.

"You have been abroad more than I," said the merchant; "can you give us an idea?"

"It seems simple enough," said Percy. "We have only to go."

"It is not so simple as it seems to you. Roger and I believe we are even now watched by the Danites, and, even if we are not, our flight would soon be discovered. Unluckily, we have no horses at our disposal, and to start without them would be to soon be overtaken."

"We can steal them, I suppose," said Percy, feebly.

"We are not thieves," his father replied.

"It may yet come to that," said Hobart, quietly. "With our lives at stake we cannot

stand on ceremony, and you would leave enough property behind to pay for all the horses we should need."

"I doubt if we could get the horses, though," said Percy. "The few in town are kept close."

"Well, some way must be contrived to get away," said Hobart, decisively. "What of your friend, Kellogg? Perhaps he could give us an idea."

"Yes," said the merchant, "and you had better go for him at once, Percy."

The young plotter could not avoid a nervous start. The proposed mission would give him just the chance Barwolf desired to decoy his rival into the Danites' hands, but Percy paused to ask himself if his share in the work would not be discovered.

The elder Brooke gave him little time for meditation, however; Roger's plainly expressed fears had aroused him, and he resolved to do what could be done at once.

Accordingly, Percy was started on his mission.

He set out at a brisk pace, but after going a few yards his steps became slow and uncertain. Then was the decisive moment of his life. If he carried out his compact with the Danite chief, he would set upon his own brow the stamp of a terrible crime; if he was true to his real friends, he would place Locke Kellogg in a fair way to win Lillian—the girl both aspired to marry.

Percy Brooke paused. Evil and good were at war within him, and his weak nature was ill-fitted for the struggle. He was alone and in darkness, without and within. Paradise Gulch was never well-lighted, and there were no passing pedestrians to see the man who stood holding tenaciously with one hand to the fence and wonder what he was doing.

He removed his hat nervously, and the breeze came down from the rocky hills and fanned his feverish face. Which way should he turn? It was really a question as to whether he should lose his love or his soul, but he did not put it so bluntly as that.

He thought of Edna and his father and shivered at the thought of their knowing him as he was. But he thought of Lillian, and his heart hardened—or shall we say his head weakened?

"I will not give her up!" he said, through his set teeth. "I will see Barwolf at once!"

A step sounded on the gravelly soil and the form of a man loomed up in the darkness. Percy looked at him sharply. As though the Evil One had come when he was bid, it was the Danite chief.

The recognition was mutual, and Barwolf laughed in a barely audible key.

"Ha! is it you? At first I thought some one had taken too much liquor and was working it off."

"It is I," said Brooke, in a voice far firmer than usual, "and I was just going to see you."

"For what reason?"

"The hour of action has come; the hour for you to secure Locke Kellogg."

"How so?"

"I have been sent to summons him to our house, and there will never be a better chance for you to get him out of the way."

Barwolf had paused, and he now looked keenly at the young man.

"Why is he wanted at your house?"

The question was so sudden that Percy started, but he knew the Danite's keen eyes were upon him, and he dared not take time for thought.

"I—I—they—Lillian wishes to see him."

A smile, invisible in the darkness, curled the chief's lips, and he suspected more than Percy would have him know.

"You are right," he said, heartily, after a brief pause. "There is no time like the present. Go you, then, and get him, and on your way home you shall be waylaid. Do not fear harm to yourself, for I will be there and conduct the whole affair. Be as speedy as you can, for the hour grows late."

"Never fear for me."

There was no cause to doubt him, in the sense he meant. He had passed the Rubicon, and he now felt an inexorable purpose to deliver his rival into the Danites' hands—to death!

Such arrangements as were necessary were soon made, and then the two men separated. Barwolf went in search of his fellow assassins, and soon had three stout fellows at his back. He led them to the point agreed upon with Percy, and then they crouched in ambush.

There was little fear of discovery. If Paradise Gulch was a hard place, it was not so in the sense usually attached to Western settlements. Intoxication was rare, and few people went abroad after dark. Many, however, stayed at home because the dark, deadly and unknown Danites were feared like the plague.

So Barwolf and his men were not molested as they awaited the coming of their victim.

Their patience was not severely tested, for two figures soon appeared some yards away, and the captain heard Percy talking in a somewhat loud voice, as had been agreed upon before they parted.

"Make ready!" the Danite ordered.

Decoy and decoyed came nearer, and then the ambushers arose as one man. Each knew what was expected of him, and they were no

novices to make a mistake. Their victim had time neither to resist nor call for help. Strong hands imprisoned his arms, while a gag was deftly passed between his teeth.

He was not at a loss to comprehend what it meant. He was a "Gentile" in a city of Mormons led by an unscrupulous man, and when a dark deed was done people were wont to say: "The Danites have been abroad!"

The Danites—the mysterious, secret, deadly! He had occasion to wonder in the minutes which followed what had become of Brooke, but just then he seemed to fade away. That he had willingly deserted him—still less that he had betrayed him—never occurred to Kellogg.

Bound and imprisoned, despite his struggles, he was hurried away, while Barwolf lingered by the side of Percy, whom he had bade pause.

"We want your company for awhile," said the chief, in a tone less gracious than usual.

"For what purpose?" Brooke asked, uneasily.

"That you may see the iron grip of the Destroying Angels. Locke Kellogg has fallen under the ban; he is a prisoner; he is doomed. Come, and make sure your rival is forever removed from your path."

"I had rather not," faltered the craven-hearted villain.

"We had rather you would," replied the iron-hearted one.

"I see no need of it—"

"It is my whim. Come!"

Barwolf spoke imperatively, and, as he spoke, laid one brawny hand on Brooke's arm. The latter shivered. As in a flash he saw the pit he had himself dug for his unwary feet. By this night's work he had placed himself in the power of the Danites, and the chief's tone showed a knowledge of the fact. That he had been deliberately drawn into the net Percy did not suspect, but he was ensnared all the same.

From that hour he was Barwolf's slave; to oppose him would be, perhaps, to call down the wrath of the Danites on his own head.

And they never struck in vain.

He hastened to say that he was at Barwolf's service, and they moved along in the rear of the kidnappers. The prisoner was taken by the most obscure paths, and in a short time arrived at a large house near that of Elder Lockdale.

It was said to be that of a leading Mormon of the town, but, as the party entered without ceremony, Percy began to suspect there was more to it, and his wavering courage dropped still lower.

CHAPTER IV.

DOWN THE PIT.

THE two men entered the building, but went no further after Kellogg and his prisoners. Instead, they entered a room at the right, where Percy saw Harrod, the spy of the Danite League.

"I will leave you here in charge of my friend," said Barwolf, "as I have business to attend to. Follow his directions as you would mine, and I will see you again."

At the last word he turned and left the room. Percy was left with the man in black. He looked at Harrod with awe, almost with fear. He had never addressed him, and had never desired to do so. He knew the Danites to be assassins, and Harrod was their spy. There had always been something about the man that awed the merchant's son. His silence, somber face, ways and dress, and his secret, stealthy way of moving about bordered on the supernatural.

It was with a shiver that he saw the man advance toward him.

"Welcome to the Danite Temple," said Harrod, in a low, but distinct, voice. "They tell me this is your first step toward joining the faithful, and I congratulate you that you are here."

"Thank you!" said Percy, awkwardly; he could not think of any reply which seemed suitable.

"It is a momentous period in your life," pursued the spy, his velvet-like eyes looking straight into the young man's. "I trust you have fully decided on your course?"

"I have," said Percy, with a successful effort to speak firmly.

"It is well; I trust you may never regret it. There is no reason why you should. You have left the paths of the unbelievers and the sinful, and taken sides with the only true faith. You have espoused a cause which is daily growing stronger, and which is yet to rule the world. New friends are yours to-night, and you will find them strong and faithful. Who so true as the Danites?"

Harrod spoke with somber energy, and for a moment his eyes lighted with unusual fire. But as he stood there, Percy could not but think that Mephistopheles had appeared on earth again, changed from a sneering demon to a somber and fanatical one, but Mephistopheles still—dark, dangerous and deadly.

The young man felt as though a nightmare was upon him. He longed for the presence of Barwolf, for that of any one, so that he need not be alone with the Danite spy. He had no fear of personal harm, but Harrod seemed to be a living reminder of the fact that he had be-

trayed an innocent and unsuspecting man to death; that he had sold his own soul and was with the purchaser.

"Come with me!" Harrod suddenly added. Percy had no power to resist. He followed like one in a stupor, while the spy led the way from the room and along a hall to a second room. This they entered.

It was destitute of furniture, paper and plastering; only bare boards met the gaze at floor, ceiling and walls. It seemed more like a stable than anything else.

Harrod went to one corner and raised a section of the planks which was like a trap-door, but which had rested firmly on timbers. He thus revealed a square, black space, from the depths of which arose damp, earth-scented air.

The Danite looked at Percy with a glitter in his eyes.

"It is where the faithful bury their victims," he said.

Then he turned to one side and took from a recess a cord and a candle. Having lighted the last, he attached it to the first and lowered it down the black space.

"Look!" he said.

Brooke obeyed. The darkness was so intense that the light looked feeble and pale, but he saw enough.

He saw protruding from the sides of the pit half a dozen short swords, or cutlasses, all with their points elevated at a slight angle.

He looked at Harrod in a puzzled way.

"What does it mean?"

"You shall see, anon," the spy answered; and then he replaced the cover of the pit, put away the candle and added: "Follow me."

Again Percy obeyed, and he was led to a third room, or, rather, to the door. There they paused and looked in on those who occupied it. They were Barwolf, Kellogg and half a dozen masked men—the Danites and their prisoner.

"He is before his judges; there is but one scene more," continued the spy. "Once more, follow me!"

They went aside and waited in the dark. Percy was nervous and trembling. He felt sure something horrible was about to occur, but he had no means of knowing what. He wished he was thousands of miles away, but he was not, and, what was more, he dared not go.

He was fully in the power of the Danites, and the small, black figure beside him seemed like an infernal guard. What there was about the man to cause such a feeling, which no other person could do, he could not tell, but when Harrod laid his hand upon his arm, Percy shrunk away like a frightened child.

The touch had been to call his attention to a new phase of the weird scene. Kellogg and the Danites had emerged from the room and were walking down the hall. The prisoner's face was pale, but he walked firmly and held his head erect.

"What are you going to do with me?" he asked.

"You will see soon enough," Barwolf answered.

"I warn you to beware of violence. If you do me harm and I escape, I will be a Nemesis on your track. If I do not escape, I have friends who will avenge me."

"What can they do against the Danites?" scornfully asked the burly chief.

"You shall see. Victory is not always to the strong, and you are going a step too far if you aspire to be common assassins. Be warned in time!"

"Not by you. We laugh at you and your warnings."

By this time the party had entered the room of the pit. Harrod took Percy by the arm and led him after. The young man felt cold and appalled. What was going to happen?

They paused at the door and watched.

The men applied a bandage to Kellogg's eyes. The breast of the prisoner heaved, he cast his eyes about as though hoping for some avenue of escape, and seemed to realize his peril, but his face showed no craven fear. Once his lips moved as though he would speak, but he closed them again and said nothing.

But Percy Brooke fairly gasped as he saw the cover of the pit raised. A cold sweat started out over his body. Was it, then, to this fate he had betrayed his rival? He longed to turn and flee, but Harrod's hand was on his arm in a tight hold, and he knew he must witness the whole of the red drama.

Kellogg was led forward, bound and helpless, to the pit; a moment would settle it all. Another step—then he shot suddenly downward into space. There was a movement of his elbows, as though he would have thrown up his hands to grasp at something which would save him; one moment his pale face was visible; then form and face disappeared.

The Danites' work was done.

Calmly and quietly they lowered the cover of the pit, and then Harrod led Percy away. The latter went unresistingly, for he was incapable of acting for himself. The horrible scene he had witnessed had seemed to dam all the natural courses of his life, and he felt only as though the weight of a mountain was pressing on his brain.

The Danites led him to the room they had first entered.

"It is finished!" said Harrod, in his somber voice. "The man who was your enemy is removed; the Destroying Angels have obeyed your will. You and they are now bound together by a bond stronger than blood; they are yours, and you are theirs. From this hour your interests are common with those of the League."

Percy plucked up a grain of courage.

"My contract referred only to Kellogg, and now that—that the work is done, it is ended."

"You are wrong. Once leagued with the Danites, you are always one of them."

"Where is Barwolf? He will tell you otherwise."

"He will say nothing of the kind. I speak for him now, and I say you are one of us while you live."

"Impossible! I have other views."

"Personal views amount to nothing when the Order speaks. Why do you demur? Is it a misfortune to be one of the grandest League the sun ever shone upon; to be one of an Order which shall grow stronger with each passing year until it eclipses all now known to men? Listen! Few know what the Sons of Dan are, as revised and perfected under Asa Lockdale's regime. We are the select and the elect; we are the children of fire and light; we are of the grandest Order in the world!"

Harrod had folded his arms across his breast and was looking into Percy's shrinking eyes with his own bold, black, unwavering ones. His voice was as somber as ever, but in his eyes shone a deeper light and his face was full of the fanatical vigor he seemed always to feel when speaking of the Sons of Dan.

Percy was more than ever impressed, and he saw the trap into which he had walked when he placed himself in the Danites' power. It might, or might not, have been premeditated by them, but the deed was done all the same, and he saw that it would not be easy to escape from the fetters.

"We will speak of this some other time," he managed to say. "Just now I am in haste—ill—expected home, and I must go at once."

He moved toward the door in a blind way, and Harrod did not oppose his departure. Instead, he unclosed the outer door; but at the threshold he paused, and looked again at his companion.

"Do not forget this hour!" he said.

"I shall never forget!" almost groaned Brooke.

"From this time you are one of us, and there is no knowing how soon we shall call on you. Good-night, brother!"

The door was opened wider and Percy went out. There was a clang behind him, and the door closed, shutting in all the dark secrets of the building—shutting out all intruders and the knowledge of Locke Kellogg's fate.

CHAPTER V.

THE NIGHT PROWLER.

YOUNG Brooke walked down the street, but he went with feet which moved mechanically and with eyes which saw not. He went toward his father's house, but his mind had no part in the matter, and he knew not where he was or where he went.

The irrevocable step had been taken. He was a criminal; a man to shrink away from the approach of strangers—to start at the sound of a footstep and the touch of a hand. From that hour every moment would seem to contain a danger.

Worse than all, he was in the power of the Danites. When they said "Come!" he must go—he was their slave. A man of stronger mind might have rebelled at this idea, but Percy was not strong-minded, and he knew the way of the Danites well. Whom they marked for death lived a brief existence.

Percy thought of Asa Lockdale, of Barwolf and of Harrod, and he shivered as though touched by an icy hand. He seemed little like a victor, yet within the hour he had seen his rival sentenced and destroyed; he was now free to woo Lillian Allen.

But he had a vague idea that, as he walked away, the specter of Locke Kellogg moved by his side, pale of face and gashed of limb, stern and accusing. He told himself it was all a fancy; but a new trouble now met him. He must go home to those relatives who loved him and believed him an honorable man—go home and tell them what he knew about Locke Kellogg!

He paused and leaned against the fence. He felt weak and little like confronting them, but it must be done and there was no use of postponing it.

With his plan already arranged, he might as well put it in execution.

He opened the door and went in, and found his father and Roger Hobart still there. Edna and Lillian had retired for the night.

"What now?" the elder Brooke asked, as he saw that Kellogg was not with his son.

"I have been unsuccessful," answered Percy, trying to speak naturally.

"Was Kellogg away from home?"

"Yes."

"And no one knew where he had gone?"

"Yes."

"That is strange," said the merchant, gravely.

"I see nothing remarkable about it," Percy replied. "He frequently goes out, and this is probably only a business or pleasure-trip for a few hours."

"That is probably the proper way of regarding the matter," said Roger. "While there is abundant reason for acknowledging there is no real safety in Paradise Gulch, I see no reason for thinking the young man has now met with trouble."

"I don't agree with you," said Wallace Brooke, moodily. "Kellogg wasn't the man to go roaming around nights, and he now knows there is real danger from the Mormons. I have a presentiment that harm has come to him."

The younger man opposed the idea, though not from a common standpoint, if the truth was known, but nothing they could say had the effect of reassuring the merchant.

"We must now talk of the future without regard to him," he finally said, abruptly. "The question is, how are we going to escape from the town, taking Edna and Lillian with us, and avoid recapture?"

"Is there no man in whom you can trust who would act as a guide—a hunter or something of that sort?"

"None," Brooke gloomily replied. "Kellogg was better informed than any other of my personal friends."

"Clearly, we must do one of two things—secure horses and make a rapid flight, or have the aid of some experienced person who could show us hiding-places by the way, if we were hard-pressed, and under whose lead we could make the most of everything."

Hobart showed a good deal of nerve in considering the danger, and, had he been acquainted with Paradise Gulch, might have soon formed a plan calculated to take them quickly out of the place. He was, however, crippled by want of information, and Percy took care not to give him any points.

It was decided that flight must be delayed for at least twenty-four hours. There seemed to be no way of obtaining horses, and to attempt flight on foot was simply madness. They would not only suffer on the trail, where their road lay through a barren country, but the Danites would soon run them down.

Their future seemed to depend on one thing. Where was Locke Kellogg? He might be dead or living, so far as Hobart or the merchant knew, but each spoke hopefully of his possible return. They decided to wait for him until another night.

The conference broke up and all prepared to retire, but Lillian Allen came to Hobart as he stood apart from the others.

"There is danger," she said.

It was neither a question nor an assertion, but in her quiet tones was an undercurrent of resolution of the true border heroine type.

"None that cannot be successfully met, I trust," Roger replied, after a brief pause.

"What is its exact nature?"

"Our peculiar situation at Paradise Gulch."

"In brief, a danger that Asa Lockdale may follow up his proposal to Edna by trying to compel her to marry him?"

"Plainly, yes."

"You should have told us before. We are women, but I trust we are not cowards. Again, 'woman's wit' has become a proverb. Perhaps we might help you out. All possible mental ability is now needed."

"It is not out of place," Roger amended.

"So, too, is courage needed."

"Beyond a doubt. But, Miss Allen, why am I thus placed under cross-examination? You have an idea; I am sure of that. What is it?"

The calm face of the girl changed expression; it became grave and troubled, and tears dimmed her eyes.

"I have had a purpose in talking, which I will now explain. I have wondered why Locke Kellogg was not here at this time—you know the bond between us well enough so that you will not think me bold when I refer to it. I spoke to my uncle—to Mr. Brooke—in regard to him, but I received only an evasive reply. The idea occurred to me that Locke was in trouble. I asked more questions, but I gained no news, and the idea grew apace that Locke had met with harm. So I resolved to entrap you. I have made you confess that every brave heart and sagacious brain is now needed, and on the strength of that I ask you, why is Mr. Kellogg not here?"

The tears still glistened in her eyes, but her voice had grown firmer, and it was no easy matter for Hobart to face her.

"My dear Miss Allen, you magnify the trouble; I assure you you do. There is no real reason for thinking Locke has met with trouble."

"Yet, you believe he has."

She was meeting him with lawyer-like logic, and he felt that it would be useless to struggle against the inevitable. Perhaps, too, it was just as well to be frank with one who had shown such real courage and firmness.

"I will tell you all. Locke is not at his room. Percy has just been to inquire for him, but he was absent. To me, this seemed a very simple thing, and I hope you will so regard it, but both your uncle and Percy insist on auguring ill from it."

"So do I," quickly answered the girl. "Do you suppose Locke would be mysteriously absent at such a time?"

"He may be working for your good, even now."

"Possibly, but I still feel that there is trouble."

Roger found it impossible to change this belief. Really, there was little foundation for it, so far as Lillian knew, but her fears had moved her to a decision which, as the reader knows, was but too near the truth.

She would wait long before she saw Locke Kellogg.

Roger reassured her as much as was possible, and then, after a talk with Edna, ostensibly retired for the night. He did not, however, seek his couch; he felt little like sleep.

No one knew better than he that the very air was full of danger. He knew Elder Lockdale of old, and knew him to be a man who would scruple at nothing when he had an end to attain. Now that he had selected Edna Brooke as a new light for his household, he would bend every effort to accomplishing his purpose, and for the others to oppose him would be to call down on their devoted heads the red vengeance of this ruler; like jacks from a box, but a thousand times more to be feared, the Danites would shoot into view at a touch of their master's thumb.

Means of opposing the Mormon elder were not such as to hold out any encouragement. Paradise Gulch was a Mormon town in the fullest sense of the word, and Asa Lockdale reigned supreme. Men came and men went at his bidding, but none dared come or go unless so bidden.

Against all these odds Hobart and his friends must contend. The town was remote from any other, and a flight on foot did not promise success. A bold push with horses would take them in time to a town of better repute, where they could defy Lockdale, but where were the horses to be obtained?

With all these thoughts drifting through his mind, Hobart remained at the window and looked out into the night. Nothing was further from his thoughts than the idea of sleeping. How could he close his eyes when Edna, the girl he loved, might at any moment be exposed to peril?

Without overestimating his own powers, he felt that it was on him, and not on either Mr. Brooke or Percy, that she must depend for safety.

"And even at that, it's a dark, rough road," he thought, gloomily. "It was an evil day that Brooke came to Paradise Gulch, to the home of this demon elder, who—"

The young man's thoughts made a sudden change. Looking from the window, he had seen a dark figure flit past the wall, and he loosened his revolver and looked again for the prowler.

CHAPTER VI.

HEAVY HAND.

ROGER was thoroughly on the alert. What he had seen might be no more than an honest rover of the night, but it was commonly said that no one went abroad at that hour in the town except the Danites.

If this was true, there was ample reason to look closely to whoever came to Brooke's house like an unquiet ghost.

But though Roger watched and listened, there was no further demonstration from the unknown. He had passed a corner of the house, and even if it had not been so, the darkness would have troubled Hobart.

Several minutes passed and nothing occurred to break the silence. Ordinarily, Roger would have given the matter but little thought, but, as it was, it would be folly to pass it by.

Finally, he arose and looked at the window. Having no expectation of a sign from the unknown, he was resolved to turn the tide and seek him; to learn if there was really trouble menacing the household.

It was not difficult to pass through the window to the ground, and he soon made the change. Extreme caution now became necessary, and he proved equal to the demands of the occasion. Stooping like an Indian upon the trail, he glided forward, his revolver held ready for use and every nerve strained to the utmost.

He had expected to be greeted by a shot, or attack of some sort, but he passed the corner safely and failed, at first, to see anything unusual beyond. A mild breeze fanned his face—and that was all.

All?

He had started to move forward again when he abruptly paused. He had almost stumbled over a dark object which lay across his path.

Plainly enough he recognized the form of a man, and, thinking he had been decoyed, he sprung back, at the same time cocking his revolver for the second time.

But the dark form remained motionless; so

far as Roger could see, not so much as a hand was lifted—not so much as a finger stirred.

Hobart looked warily about him. He felt sure something strange and unusual had occurred, and he was not a man to be caught by an artifice. Bold as he was, his courage was tempered by prudence.

When satisfied that no other person was visible, and that no foe was waiting to shoot him down, he advanced and once more stood over the unknown.

"A man and a stranger. Who and what is he, and why is he here? Is he drunk, sick, or—Ha! what is this? Something wet—blood! Part of the story is told; but how did he die? Who has killed a human being, and left his body at our door?"

It was a question not easily answered. Whether this motionless clay was the prowler, or the prowler's victim, Roger had no means of knowing.

For some time he felt around for the fatal wound, but, finding none, resolved to re-enter the house and see Wallace Brooke. The case was too serious for him to deal with alone.

He went in by the same means as he had passed out and aroused Brooke without trouble or alarm. The merchant listened with manifest perturbation to the story, but without any loud expression of alarm.

"It is nothing more than I expected," he said, when Roger was through.

"You have a theory, then?"

"Not that, but when I knew Asa Lockdale had his evil eye on our household, I expected dead men would become a common thing."

Roger laid one hand on the elder man's shoulder.

"Do not give way to gloomy forebodings," he said, in a voice which expressed more than his words. "I have seen a good deal of wild life in the West, and have pulled out of more than one tight corner. I have faith to believe I can outwit our enemies now."

"Would that I had your youth, strength and courage," said Brooke, "but I am old even beyond my years. But, enough of this. Let us to the deceased."

"One moment; you had better make sure Edna and Miss Allen are safe."

It was a wise precaution, and the merchant proceeded to carry out the suggestion. He soon rejoined Roger and reported that the girls were sleeping peacefully. Both men went outside at once. Brooke carried a light, and with this they proceeded to examine the dead man.

Brooke recognized the face as that of a man he had several times seen in Paradise Gulch, and whom he had supposed to be a dweller there, but whether he was one of the Danites he did not know, for, as has been said, no one knew just who belonged to the secret band except Barwolf and Harrod.

This inanimate clay might have been a Danite when in life, or might not.

They had no means of telling.

Continuing the examination, they found the fatal wound in the shape of a stab near the heart. No sooner had Brooke seen it than he started back.

"Heavy Hand!" he exclaimed.

"What?" questioned Roger.

"I mean that this is the work of Heavy Hand."

"I have heard the name before, but it is practically a mystery to me. Report says there is a mysterious slayer in, and about, Paradise Gulch, who kills men at his convenience and cannot be caught. Who and what is he, and why do you say so confidently that this is his work?"

"Perhaps I am hasty, but this deep, narrow cut is a characteristic of Heavy Hand. When you ask who he is you puzzle me more. I doubt if any man besides himself can answer the question. He is reported to be an indiscriminate slayer of men, but I have a theory that—"

Brooke paused, but Roger was not inclined to have his views lost.

"That what?"

"That the men found here and there are one and all tools of Lockdale; that Heavy Hand is a man aroused to fury by wrongs heaped upon him by the Mormons—perhaps by Lockdale, personally."

"You must have some reason."

"Why do you think so?"

"Your view is a romantic, rather than a practical one."

"Call it so, if you will, but I cannot explain it. In any case, Heavy Hand is a creature of mystery. He slays here and there and leaves no sign besides his dead and this deep, narrow-lipped cut. Oddly, or not, his victims are always men in the lower walks of life; men who have no visible means of subsistence. From this I argue they are of the mysterious Danite band, and that, in some way, a scourge has been set upon them by their crimes."

"We will speak of that later. Just now, the question is, why was this man killed almost at your door?"

Brooke gazed silently at the fast-whitening face before him for several moments before answering.

"It is impossible to say," he finally replied.

"Unless my eyes deceive me, this fellow was a villain. His is a brutal, evil-looking face, and I do not believe he was here for any good."

"He is not likely to do any further harm," said Roger, tersely. "But we are losing valuable time while standing here. I want to search the vicinity. Await my return, and I will see if there is anything more to be discovered."

He was gone while the last word was yet on his lips, his revolver held ready for use and his keen eyes on the alert for living creatures, be they friends or foes. The blood which had stirred in his veins during several years of wild adventure in the past seemed to leap anew, and a prowler would have fared poorly had he chanced upon him.

But no such person was found; no human being besides themselves seemed astir.

He returned to find Brooke where he had left him.

Although the dead man was a ghastly thing to have lying at one's door during the silent watches of the night, they agreed that they had no choice save to leave it there.

To go on the street might be to fall into the hands of the Danites, who were reputed sleepless, while if the deceased had been of their band it was their place to look him up.

Brooke and Hobart re-entered the house, but it seemed as though an additional gloom had fallen upon it. The last discovery had proved that red work was abroad in Paradise Gulch, and the fact that the tragedy was shrouded in mystery only served to add to their dark forebodings.

The merchant asked Roger to sit down while he made a circuit of the interior of the house, and the younger man obeyed. He gave himself up to thought. Were they doing wisely to remain where they were? Was it not better to push out on foot and few of numbers, than to remain and meet the sure persecution of Elder Lockdale?

Lockdale!

Hobart's blood tingled at thought of the Mormon. There had been a time when he had the will to end the elder's career forever, and he would have brought him to justice in some way had he been sure his strong suspicions were correct.

A doubt had saved the man, but on this evening Roger began to regret his clemency. Again the wretch had crossed his path like a dark shadow, and there was no knowing where it would end.

The sound of heavy, hasty footsteps aroused the young man.

He looked up quickly and saw Wallace Brooke, but a change had come to the merchant. His face was pale, and he stood within the doorway, holding to the side, as though his trembling limbs would not support him.

His whole appearance augured fresh misfortune.

Hobart leaped to his feet.

"What is it?" he almost fiercely demanded.

Brooke's lips moved twice before any sound came forth. Then he replied:

"Edna is gone!"

CHAPTER VII.

THE SHADOW ASSUMES FORM.

It was not so much the words, which might be variously interpreted, as Wallace Brooke's look and tone which brought a startled look to Roger's face.

"Gone!" he echoed, blankly.

"Yes."

The merchant spoke the monosyllable weakly, while his hands moved aimlessly about his neck as though to ease a pressure there.

"Where? How? Explain!"

"I know nothing."

Hobart strode forward and seized the elder man's arm in a tenacious grip. His own face had grown calm, but his eyes glowed with a fire which told that he was thoroughly aroused.

"We must lose no time," he said, in a voice which silently commanded obedience. "You say Edna is gone. Tell me all you know about it."

"There is little to tell. When I left you I made a circuit of the house, as I had arranged to do. All seemed as usual, quiet and orderly. As I neared the room occupied by Edna and Lilian, the fears I had all along entertained for their safety impelled me to again look in upon them, as I had done an hour before. They had left their light dimly burning, rendering this easy. I looked and saw that Edna was missing. Alarmed, I hurriedly entered the room. The odor of some drug was wafted to my nostrils. I caught Lilian by the shoulder; she did not arouse or open her eyes—she was drugged!"

"Go on!"

Brooke had paused, as though for breath, but Roger, towering above him like a gladiator, uttered the two words with penetrating force.

"That is all," the merchant added. "Lilian lies insensible, and Edna is gone—abducted, no doubt, by Lockdale. The dead man outside the house was but a forerunner of the wrath to come."

He seemed inclined to despair, but it was not so with Roger. The emergency aroused all the

force and combativeness of his nature. The shadow which had hung over the devoted household had assumed form; the crash they had dreaded seemed to have come; but the brave nature of the young man asserted itself and he arose superior to common weakness.

Then, if ever, was the time for action. Edna, the girl whom he hoped to make his wife, was in trouble—perhaps even then in the house of Asa Lockdale—and energetic measures were demanded in her behalf.

"Arouse Percy," he said, steadily. "I will join you in a moment, but, for now, I want to go outside the house. While awaiting my return, look to see where the abductors entered; it does not seem possible they made use of the single window we have had open."

He gave the merchant little time to discuss the matter; he knew that if the kidnappers were still within reach of the house they must be dropped upon quickly if at all.

Once more grasping his revolver, he went through the window and to the street.

But no human being was in sight.

Had Paradise Gulch been a city of the dead the town could not have been quieter, so far as Roger could then see. No footstep echoed on the street, and the light from Brooke's house was the only one visible.

Convinced that the abductors were no longer near the house, Roger quickly returned to the room where he had left the merchant. The latter was not there, but Roger heard him hammering at the door of Percy's room.

That young man was sleeping soundly after tossing restlessly about until exhausted.

Disgusted with the delay, Hobart strode forward and was just in time to see the door opened and the face of Percy appear, pale, troubled, frightened. In fact, the hour was past when Percy Brooke would sleep peacefully, or awaken calmly, and he looked at the other men tremblingly.

"What is it?" he demanded.

"Edna is gone—stolen, kidnapped!" said Roger, harshly.

"Kidnapped!"

"Ay, so I said."

"Edna!"

Hobart strode forward and grasped his arm in a crushing hold.

"Arouse!" he ordered. "Are you still asleep, or where are you wits wandering? Do you hear me? Edna, your sister, is gone—is stolen. Even now she may be in the house of Asa Lockdale!"

"Merciful Heaven!"

Percy gasped the words, and then reeled back against the side of the door. If he had been ignorant before, he now began to see with what manner of men he had leagued himself.

"Curse them!" he added, with an incoherency of mind, if not of speech.

"We can do better; we can give blow for blow," said Roger, rejoiced at what he deemed true courage in a man whose nerve he had always doubted. "Dress and come with me; we may save her yet."

The first part of his direction was obeyed, and they were finally ready for departure. It had been arranged that the elder Brooke should remain and care for Lilian, who began to show signs of returning consciousness, but Percy scarcely knew what plans were being considered.

He cared for his sister as much as one of his weak nature could do, and he was enraged that the Mormons should dare molest her after he had aided them—had sold his soul at their bidding.

For the time being he felt a fury in his veins and was a zealous, though reckless, champion.

The young men soon gained the street.

"Set your face toward Asa Lockdale and make all possible haste," said Roger.

"Come on!" and Percy flourished his revolver.

"Are you prepared to fight if there is a chance?"

"To the death."

"Remember, it may be against Lockdale's Danites, and they are said to hang together, for mischief and for revenge, like brothers. To attack one, we may draw the wrath of all upon us."

"So be it, then; I will follow where you lead."

They hurried along the street toward the elder's house. Unfortunately, Hobart allowed conversation to cease, and this gave Percy a chance to think. With meditation came alarm. He remembered Lockdale, Barwolf, Harrod, the fate of Locke Kellogg and the bond which connected him with the "Destroying Angels."

The sound of their footsteps on the otherwise silent street terrified him, and he expected every moment to feel a hand on his shoulder, to see the face of Harrod, and to hear again that cold, machine-like voice, saying, as the spy had said before:

"You are one of us; our will is now your law. Defy us at your peril!"

So far as the charge of cowardice was concerned, Percy would have turned back, but he feared men would suspect the truth and know him as an ally of the Mormons.

They went on until the elder's house was reached, but it was as dark and silent as though

no human being breathed within it. If Edna had been taken there, the secret was well preserved.

Percy was glad it was so, and he at once took the ground that they had struck a false scent and had prevented further argument, but Percy was by no means at ease. His own inclination to fight for Edna had wavered perceptibly—he liked her but liked himself even better—and he did not know to what length Roger would go.

"A hot-headed fellow!" he mentally pronounced his companion; but Hobart, though not to be daunted by any danger, was not so reckless as Percy thought.

"I doubt if you can get into the house," the latter said, aloud.

"I can at least try."

Roger said no more; he was disgusted with a brother who would turn back when his sister was in peril; but he at once began to seek for a place of entrance.

Percy would never have found one, for, as he had suggested, the house was supposed to be proof against the efforts of any intruder, but Roger was not a man to be easily baffled, and he soon had the way open.

Much to Brooke's relief, he was directed to remain outside, but Roger did not want him. It was literally putting one's head into the lair of the tiger, and only stout hearts and strong nerves were needed there.

When death is to be faced, there is no call for cowards.

So Roger decided to go alone, and moving, was soon inside the house of mystery.

CHAPTER VIII.

INSIDE THE ELDER'S HOUSE.

THE adventure was fairly begun, but there was no knowing where it would end. Hobart knew very well there were other people to be met inside the house than the Mormon elder and his numerous wives. Even in the old days Lockdale had taken care to have his precious life guarded by armed men, and with the Destroying Angels of the Gulch at hand, it was not likely he would leave any chance open for enemies.

For even in the midst of his power, the elder knew there were men who might come to him secretly with murder in their hearts, to avenge the dark deeds he had done in the past.

Roger had secured a bull's-eye lantern, and when once inside he turned the slide so as to get a view of the interior. He was in a room of medium size and common appearance; there was no occasion to pause there.

He went on with his revolver and knife close at hand. He had begun to fully realize the danger of his situation. Being a stranger to the house he could not go a rod without a light, and the light seemed certain to sooner or later betray him to the Danites.

There came a time when mature thought convinced him he had acted with mad recklessness in thus bearding the lion in his den, but, just then, he had only one thought—it was of Edna! Edna, the girl he loved, was in dire peril, and he was ready to risk all to save her.

As he went on he wondered at the stillness of the house. Had it been uninhabited it could not have been quieter.

Still, it was no far-stretching old-time castle, and he knew discoveries of some kind must soon begin.

The first act in the drama came when he perceived a narrow ray of light resting on the floor not far ahead of him—clearly, that which fell through a door which fitted but loosely.

Hobart redoubled his caution, and, with his knife firmly grasped, crept forward. He soon reached the ray of light. It came from under a door, but the crack was not large enough for him to gain a view of the interior. In vain he pressed himself tightly to the floor; he could see nothing. He listened; there was no sound of voices.

Then he arose and laid his hand on the knob of the door. It was a risky thing to do, but he was in a mood for great risks. He turned the knob slowly, and then pulled back; but the effort met with a resistance which told plainly enough that the bolt had been turned.

For a moment he stood in hesitation, and then the whole scene was abruptly changed by an occurrence beyond his control.

He felt a light touch upon his hand, but, before he could turn, the lamp was snatched from his hold and the light extinguished at one and the same time. It had been done so quickly that Roger was dazed and at fault; he had seen no one, and knew not to whom to ascribe the affair.

With his knife held ready for use he stood at bay. Every moment he expected to feel the touch of the hand again; this time in anger; or perchance the touch of assassin steel; but no such demonstration came.

Silence and darkness reigned all around.

Roger was perplexed and ill at ease. He knew it had been a human hand that had deprived him of the light; he was too sensible to believe in things supernatural; but who had done it, and where had he—or she—gone?

Several minutes passed, and the adventurer grew more and more mystified. He would not

move, and he knew not what next to expect. Had the unknown vanished into air, or—

"Be still!"

The words seemed unnecessary, since Hobart had not moved, but they arose from the darkness and he believed they came from the person who had before shown signs of life.

"Be still!" the voice repeated. "You are in great danger here, but, by using extreme caution, you may save yourself and learn something to your advantage. Barwolf, chief of the Danites, is about to pass here. If you remain, you are sure to be discovered. Come with me!"

A hand was laid on Hobart's arm, and, both by the grasp and the words, the unknown implied that there was no doubt but the young man would obey. A whim seized the latter to do so, and, conducted by his strange guide, he passed lightly on along the hall.

He looked in vain to see who his companion was. It had been a man's voice, but the figure beside him was smaller by far than his. More than this he could not tell in the darkness.

They paused in a niche in the wall.

"Wait here," said the guide. "Barwolf is coming."

There was a slight stir at the outer end of the hall; then a light appeared. A door was flung open and men crossed the threshold. At their head was Barwolf. Those who followed bore a burden, and Roger, looking closer, saw that it was a man, or his lifeless body.

He remembered the fellow who had died near Wallace Brooke's and suspected that he knew more about the matter than he was supposed to do.

His unknown companion again touched his arm.

"Look!" he said, in an exultant tone. "Behold how the tools of the Mormon ruler perish. There is one Danite the less; it is but lifeless clay they are bearing home!"

There was no time to say more. Barwolf and his men advanced, bearing their burden. Hobart looked closely, and, by the light of the lamp they carried, saw that the dead man was indeed he who had died at Brooke's.

It seemed that he had fallen while Edna was being abducted, but who had slain him?

Ay, there was the mystery!

The Danites passed on, and again Roger's arm was touched.

"Remain here, alone, for a minute," said the unknown. "Do not stir on any account. I am your friend, but I must go elsewhere for awhile. If you obey me fully, I will show you that which will be of interest. Will you do so?"

Hobart looked sharply toward the speaker. He wished that the darkness was less intense, so that he might see the face of a man who thus avowed himself a friend, but he could not even tell whether he was white, black or red.

The proposed departure might be no more than the cover for a trap, yet Roger was disposed to trust him. The stranger's manner was confidence-inspiring.

"Go, if you wish. I will await your return," he replied.

"Adieu, then, for five minutes."

There was a sound of light footsteps, and then Roger was alone.

The case was assuming a form where he doubted if he was doing wisely. He had started on this expedition believing he had no friend in Paradise Gulch upon whom he could rely. He had entered Lockdale's house believing all inside were enemies. Yet, when a stranger came and claimed to be a friend, he had trusted him unquestioned.

It seemed madness. Perhaps the man had gone to summon the Danites. There was no proof to the contrary, and Roger could only have argued against it that he believed he was to be trusted.

And this was practical Roger Hobart!

Yet, despite his doubts, he kept his place, and at the end of a few minutes the light footsteps again sounded beside him.

"Be calm—it is I!" said the even voice. "You came here to learn something of Edna, and the time is now ripe. Come with me!"

Roger turned and would have caught the stranger by the arm had not the latter receded.

"Keep your distance," he coldly said. "Do not turn a friend into an enemy."

"I beg your pardon, but you spoke of Edna. What do you know of her?"

"Nothing, but you may soon know something. There is a report to be made to the elder by the Danites, and Harrod, the spy, has been selected for the purpose. We have only to listen to him, and then we shall know as much as he does."

It was a vague and unsatisfactory promise, but Roger was beginning to feel like going with the tide, and the sound of voices at the point where Barwolf and his men had disappeared caused the intruder to look in that direction, and he saw Harrod come out bearing a lamp.

"No other person dares face Lockdale now," said Hobart's companion.

"Why so?"

There was no reply, and the Danite spy came softly down the hall. Clad in black from head to foot, as usual, he looked somber enough, and his set, gloomy face heightened the impression.

No man had ever been heard to say that he comprehended the thoughts and motives which guided the mysterious man.

He advanced along the hall like a ghost, flitted past the concealed watchers, advanced to the elder's door and there knocked in a peculiar way.

It was promptly opened and he went within.

Then Hobart's companion touched his arm again.

"Come," he said, "and we will hear the spy's report."

They went and were soon at the door. It had been closed, but this did not prevent the sound of voices from distinctly reaching them.

"Have you brought the maiden?"

It was the voice of the elder, and Roger set his teeth tightly. He felt an impulse to rush within and strike down this foul wretch, even in his own stronghold.

"I have come to deliver Barwolf's report," replied the even voice of the Danite spy.

"Why does he not deliver it himself?"

"Because he has failed."

"What?" cried the elder, sharply.

"I say he has failed," said Harrod, as calmly as though his news was of no importance. "He has not brought Edna Brooke to you, because he could not find her."

CHAPTER IX.

LOCKDALE HEARS BAD NEWS.

AN exclamation sounded from the room which was in the elder's voice, and yet which was not such as an elder of any church should use.

"Could not find her?" Lockdale added, angrily. "What do you mean by that?"

"Simply what I say, my master," evenly replied Harrod. "The girl was gone from Brooke's house when our men arrived there."

"Have they all fled?"

"No. All are there save her."

"I do not believe your story!" angrily announced Lockdale, smiting the table.

"Why should you doubt it, my master? Did you ever know me to deceive you? Did Barwolf ever lie to you?"

There was not the slightest trace of emotion in the spy's calm voice, but it was potent in its way. The elder hesitated, and then dropped heavily into the chair from which he had arisen.

"Tell me all, Harrod," he said.

"It is a simple story. Agreeably to your orders, Captain Barwolf sent Cleon to guard the house while the minutes slipped away until what the chief thought the proper time for taking the girl away."

"Make haste—use no useless words. Cleon was sent to watch the house. Well?"

"Later," said Harrod, still unmoved, "the Danites moved. When they arrived at the house they found Cleon dead."

"What?"

Lockdale's voice arose so loudly and angrily that Roger started, but the hand of his companion pressed his arm and his voice softly said: "Be calm!"

"I repeat, Cleon was dead," said Harrod, coolly.

"Fool!" angrily exclaimed the elder. "will you delay all night? Tell me how he died. Whose hand did the deed? Was it Wallace Brooke's?"

"He was found just outside the house, stabbed to the heart. The Danites listened to Brooke's family, the members of which were astir, and they found them as ignorant as any one how Cleon had died. It was a puzzle to the Gentiles; it was a puzzle to Barwolf and his followers. But the chief has a theory."

"And that?" impatiently demanded the elder.

"Points to Heavy Hand!"

"Heavy Hand?"

Lockdale started back, and a grayish pallor overspread his face. Early that night he had sneered when Heavy Hand, the slayer, was mentioned, but since Rudolph had died in his own house and he had had time to meditate, he had been less skeptical.

"Ay!" answered Harrod calmly.

"Was—the cut like that left by the strange being you call Heavy Hand?"

"Very like."

"You have seen it?"

"Ay."

"And Barwolf?"

"Ay, my master."

The elder took a turn about the room.

"Harrod, who and what is this man? Is it really at the hands of one, and one only, that we have lost so many stout fellows of late? Is there a destroyer on our track? If so, who and what is he?"

"I really do not know," the spy replied. "Have you offended any one?"

The elder winced; except for his narrow circle of followers, it was easier to find foes than friends. He had even feared at times that the real leaders of the Mormon church might resent his desertion, and rivalry in power, by removing him. He was more troubled to think which one of his many enemies had probably aimed at him than to tell if any one was likely to do so.

"Do you suppose any one would molest me—"

an elder of the true church?" he asked, with a hypocritical raising of eyes and hands.

"Let us hope not," replied Harrod, with more zeal than he had before shown. "Who could be so base? What wretch dares forget that you are the only true prophet of the New Zion, and he from whom must spring a race of prophets, and kings, and princes, whom the worshipers of heat and fire shall bow down to?"

The spy crossed his hands and rolled up his black eyes till little more than the whites could be seen, and his voice sounded somberly and weirdly.

Roger Hobart's unknown friend touched him yet again.

"A fanatic—a blind, dull, stupid follower of Asa Lockdale; yet a keen, shrewd follower, and dangerous, withal. Beware of Harrod!"

The elder was gratified at seeing the hold he had on his man, and he managed to shake off his gloomy mood and speak with more vigor.

"But the girl—this Edna—what of her?" he asked.

"Therein lies the mystery, my master," the spy replied. "Barwolf did not secure her, for the very good reason that she was gone before his arrival. She has disappeared, when and how no man knows—certainly not her father and brother. They are as much in the dark as is Barwolf. Cleon was set to guard the house, and the girl was then there. Two hours later Cleon was dead at the door and the girl was gone."

"Bah! 'twas the work of the Brookes."

"I can almost swear they know nothing about it. On the contrary, they are wild with fear, and the girl's lover, Hobart—I told you he had arrived, my master—is rushing about the streets in search of her."

"Ha! is it so?"

"Ay."

"Ha! ha! ha!"

Lockdale laughed aloud, and Roger clinched his hands and breathed heavily. He was tempted to rush upon the mocking demon, whom he hated for the old and new score, and dash him to the floor, but the restraining hand compressed his arm, and the same steady voice sounded in his ear:

"Be calm! Leave all to me, and I will prove a stronger friend than you expect. Be calm!"

Strangely enough, the voice itself calmed Hobart, and he did nothing rash. But he registered a vow that the day should yet come when he would make Asa Lockdale howl for mercy like the miserable wolf he so resembled.

"This is glorious news," said the elder. "Nothing could please me more. But, wait! What if he finds her?"

"There's the rub," the spy acknowledged.

"Harrod, you are reputed the shrewdest man in Paradise Gulch—"

"Next to you, my master," said the Danite, with a deep bow.

"Have it as you will, but, see here! Can't you find Edna—my darling Edna—before Roger Hobart does?"

"Where shall I look?"

"Where? Everywhere!"

"Barwolf and his men are doing that. You will remember that every pass leading from the city is already guarded, so Wallace Brooke cannot flee, and we had supposed even a fly could scarcely pass through. Now, Barwolf has out all his men, looking here, there, everywhere, but as yet there is no clew to the missing girl. What more can I do, my master?"

"You can succeed; you must succeed. I will turn over every grain of sand in Utah, but I will have the girl back. She comes into my harem, or I will make Paradise Gulch a graveyard with fighting for her. But, Harrod, how went she away? Not alone, surely, for, knowing my purpose as she did, and bating me as she did—I am blunt, you see, good Harrod—she would not leave her friends and try her desperate fortunes alone. Some other man has abducted her!"

"Do you think so, my master?"

"I am sure of it."

"But who?"

"Had she another lover?"

"Not that I am aware of."

"It is passing strange—but we are losing time. Go out and say to Barwolf, who was so timid about facing me, that I do not blame him for what has occurred, but that Edna Brooke must be found and given to me. I make him responsible for her return. Take the last sentence to yourself, Harrod. Between you two the girl MUST be returned!"

If the elder had had a deadly spite against the word "must" he could not have come down upon it with more force, and the spy knew it was equivalent to saying that his position, and his life, depended on his succeeding. It was not the first time the Mormon leader had made that condition.

Even with his abject followers, he was merciless.

Harrod bowed low.

"It is just, my master," he said.

"Go now, and bid Barwolf lose no time."

"Ay!"

He turned toward the door, but Roger Hobart's unknown friend had foreseen the move-

ment and averted discovery. He drew him back until they reached the niche before mentioned.

"You see it is a waste of time for you to be here, and that you are needlessly daring great danger," said the stranger. "Neither Lockdale nor the Danites know where Edna Brooke is."

"Are you sure Harrod told the truth?"

"Harrod? He would sell a score of souls, did he possess them, for the elder. He is as much an abject slave as a dog. Rest assured, he will play no trick with Asa Lockdale."

"Then, where is Edna?"

"I do not know."

"Again, who are you who knows so much about this place?" Roger suspiciously continued.

"Wait a moment and you shall know. Just now, it is wise to keep an eye on Harrod. He has gone to Barwolf, and there is no knowing what mischief they will hatch. Wait for me!"

At the last word, the stranger glided away.

CHAPTER X.

A STRANGE FRIEND.

ONE moment the unknown's steps sounded on the floor, and then he was gone and silence reigned all around Hobart. He hardly knew what course to take. He was satisfied that Lockdale and his followers were really ignorant of the whereabouts of Edna, and he wished to be looking for her, himself.

But his new friend had directed him to await his return, and he had shown himself a man of such courage and information that it occurred to Roger he would make a good ally if he could be permanently secured.

But was he really a friend? Strictly speaking, he had not yet proved himself so, and there was a chance that he might return and bring Barwolf with him.

For awhile Roger considered the possibility, but due meditation convinced him it was less probable than possible, and he resolved to wait.

His patience was not long tested. Quick, light steps sounded on the floor, his name was softly spoken, and then the stranger added:

"We had better get out of here. Barwolf and his men are about going on the trail to find Edna, and your position is not one of safety. Come!"

Roger followed unhesitatingly, and was led to a window which led to the outer air. There more light was available, and he looked keenly at his companion, but the latter kept well back where the shadows were deepest.

"We part here," he said, quietly.

"Part?"

"Yes."

"I had hoped we might be friends further than on this occasion."

"So we may, perhaps; but I must decline going with you. I have other work to do. Possibly you will see me again when you most need me."

"How shall I recognize you?"

"By my deeds."

"Do you mean that you object to my knowing your face?"

"Yes."

"And your name, also?"

"Certainly not. Do you wish to know that?"

"If you please."

"I am Heavy Hand!"

The words were calmly and quietly spoken, but they made Roger start violently. No assertion would have surprised him more, yet he was at once impressed by the belief that the stranger spoke the truth. He had wondered at his ability to come and go so freely in Lockdale's house, but if he was indeed Heavy Hand, the strange, mysterious and incomprehensible, one-half the mystery was explained.

"Is it possible?" he exclaimed.

There was no answer; dead silence reigned all around.

"Why did you not tell me this before?" he continued.

Still no reply.

Hobart bent forward and looked keenly into the dark space before him, and then the truth became apparent. The stranger was gone; he had declared his identity and then receded with the silence of a specter. When Roger realized that he was really gone he was for a moment inclined to think he really was one, so surprised and confused was he; but practical common-sense soon asserted its sway, and he knew the truth—that the stranger, being very light-footed, had managed to get away unheard, the intense darkness favoring his movements.

If Roger had been less surprised, and had expected such a thing, it could not have occurred under his eyes unseen, but all the chances had favored Heavy Hand.

Heavy Hand? Was it really this mystery and scourge of the Mormon town that Roger had met?

There was no means of settling the question, and luckily the young man did not try to do so then. He knew that the quicker he was out of Lockdale's house the better it would be for him; he suspected, even then, that his unknown ally had led him to the window that he might the more readily go; and as there was little hope

for the latter's return, Roger passed out and stood once more under the sky.

The elder's house was no longer dark and still. There was no disturbance visible, but, here and there, were signs that energetic measures were to be taken to find Edna Brooke.

Roger was perplexed. If the girl was not in the elder's hands, where was she? That she had gone from her father's home willingly he did not believe. He did think she had been kidnapped. But, by whom?

His mind hovered for a moment upon Barwolf, but the idea really seemed absurd. The chief, and Harrod, were said to be so thoroughly devoted to the elder that they thought and acted as he did, and it seemed a waste of time to connect them with the abduction.

But there were other Danites. Perhaps some member of the band had stabbed Cleon and then stolen Edna, taking her away—

But, no; both Wallace Brooke and Harrod had emphatically given the opinion that Cleon had died at the hands of Heavy Hand.

Hobart started abruptly. Might Heavy Hand not be the abductor? As the idea flashed upon him he blamed his stupidity for not thinking of it sooner, and closely questioning the man who had claimed to be Heavy Hand.

It was too late to turn back and see him then. Barwolf and his men were thoroughly astir, and to linger near the place would be to run risk of discovery at their hands. Roger resolved to return at once to Brooke's.

He looked for Percy, whom he had left awaiting his return, but the young man was not to be found. This was not surprising. Roger had been gone so long that he had expected Percy would tire of waiting long before.

Convinced that he had really gone, Hobart set his face toward Brooke's and hurried away. The night was growing old, and it was time he saw the merchant again.

Striding along the silent street his mind was occupied with thoughts of Edna to the exclusion of all other things. Where was she? Into what hostile hands had she fallen? What danger menaced her?—her, the woman he loved!

He set his teeth so tightly that they grated, and then his hand fell upon his revolver.

"Woe to whoever the man is!" he muttered. "I do not believe there are enough Danites in Paradise Gulch to put me off life's stage, and I will be a scourge to them if they have dared harm her. I swear it!"

He went on and was fast nearing Wallace Brooke's. He was passing along a sidewalk over which hung thickly-leaved trees, which made a deep shadow, when a sound behind him aroused sudden suspicion, and the habit of his career of wild adventure in the past prevailed over the more peaceful one of later years.

He wheeled, and none too soon.

Before him was a man of what then seemed gigantic size, and Roger no sooner saw that one hand was raised on high than he suspected the truth.

It was the man's intention to stab him.

He even saw the knife glittering dully where a ray of light fell through the tree-top.

There was no time for flight, even if he had been so inclined, and no time to dodge the stroke. He saw his one chance and took advantage of it.

Throwing up his hands, he caught the assassin's wrist as it fell, in a way which would otherwise have driven the knife home in his body.

A curse fell from the unknown's lips and he made an effort to jerk his hand away, but the result showed him that Hobart's strength was not to be scorned.

The latter held fast, and then began a desperate struggle, the primary object of which was the possession of the knife.

The would-be assassin had it, but he could not use it. Roger could not touch the knife, but he controlled the owner's wrist, to a certain degree, and was careful not to give him a chance at it.

Back and forth they struggled, fighting as only two strong men can fight. It was a peculiarity of the strife that neither put forth a blow of any kind, and it seemed for awhile that victory would be with the man who had the greater endurance.

But Hobart, looking down the street, saw a light swinging about as though carried by some one, and it occurred to him that Barwolf and his braves were coming.

The idea was enough to thoroughly arouse him.

He put forth renewed efforts, and the two whirled about so rapidly that it would have been difficult for a spectator to have distinguished either from the other. Roger, however, had a well-defined purpose in view, and he improved the first chance to try it.

At one side was a descent of several feet, and as they reeled toward it, he put forth all his strength and attempted to hurl his enemy over.

He succeeded, but the plan worked more extensively than he had planned.

The assassin fell, but he clung tightly to Roger, and both went over together.

There was a moment of suspense, and then they struck with a thud, Hobart alighting at

the top. Their hold was broken, and the young man proceeded to renew it, but met with no response. The unknown lay silent and motionless.

Fearing a trick, Roger waited irresolutely, but as he did so something damp touched his hand. He started, suspecting the truth, and, putting out his hand again, touched the would-be assassin's knife.

In the fall, it had been driven to the hilt in its owner's side.

A brief examination showed that the man would never use it again. Had it been sped by human hands with deliberate aim it could not have gone truer, and the fellow lay dead in the midst of his crimes, known and unknown.

Roger struck a match and looked at his face. It was a strange one to him, but it had a hard and brutal expression, and he could not but feel that the fellow had met with a merited end.

CHAPTER XI.

THE DYING DANITE.

HOBART did not delay long near the dead man. Time was passing on, and he knew that Wallace Brooke would be anxiously awaiting his return, so he reascended the bank and started on again.

He went three paces and then paused.

Lying across the path he saw a second man.

The form was extended at full length and gave no sign of motion, but Roger did not know whether to class it as among the dead or living. It lay near where he had first engaged his late adversary, but the fact that it was so quiet suggested that it might be the trick of a living creature, or the uncanny manifestation of a lifeless one. Ay, Hobart was so moved by all that he had seen that night that he seemed carried back to the Dark Ages when ghosts and demons associated freely with human beings.

"Bah!"

He threw off the weird impression and, holding his knife ready for use, strode forward to investigate the mystery of this second fallen man.

Lifeless as the other he seemed, but when Roger touched him there was a slight movement and keen eyes looked up into those of the investigator.

"Let me alone!" said a husky voice.

"Lord bless you, I'm not touching you!"

Roger replied, watching warily.

"I'm a dead man!"

"You use your tongue well for one in that state."

"I die by the act of Heavy Hand!" cried the unknown, with passionate emphasis.

Roger started.

"Are you telling the truth?" he demanded.

"Why should I lie to you? Would I remain like a clod if I had the strength to strike you down? Listen: I am Yusef, of Barwolf's band. I came out with Ruric to search for the girl who is missing. We saw you on the street and resolved to kill you. We concealed ourselves; you approached; Ruric stole up behind you to stab you in the back. You heard his footsteps and turned upon him. When you did turn I thought I saw my chance. I moved, resolved to strike you down. Instead, an unseen hand sped a knife which has cut me to the heart. Ah! I am a dying man, and my death lies at the door of Heavy Hand!"

"Did you see him?" Roger eagerly asked.

"See Heavy Hand? No human eye has ever done that. He is an invisible demon, and—Holy Virgin! I am a dying man! How my life-blood flows!"

The man's mind seemed wandering, and Roger shook him by the arm.

"Awake! arouse!" he said, distinctly. "How do you know it was Heavy Hand who struck you?"

"Who else should it be? The work was his, like him, and well done. He has a grudge against the Danites, and they may well tremble. One by one he will cut them down. I can see it now; approaching death clears my vision, and I say it as a prophet. Man, you are the lover of Edna Brooke?"

The dying Danite made a sudden change of subject and tone, and caught Roger's arm in a grip surprisingly firm for one on the dark road to oblivion.

Roger hesitated for a moment only.

"I am," he firmly replied.

The Danite chuckled horribly.

"You will never possess her. She is doomed, doomed, doomed. Asa Lockdale will marry her."

"Where is she now?"

"Who knows? Not I—nor do I care. I am too near the dark river for thoughts of things earthly. So be it; I am content to go. I am about to be transformed from my mortal shape to a more glorious one. I go to the prince of light, and heat and fire. I go—to—to the Danites' paradise!"

He gasped once, his nerveless hand fell—and he was gone. Where?

Several minutes passed before Roger aroused from the stupor which had fallen upon him when he witnessed that strange, fanatical death-scene. Somehow, it had a weirdness which impressed him unpleasantly, and when

he started up, it was as though stirring from a nightmare.

Yusef was dead. Whether or not he had gone to the Danites' paradise, he was done with earth, and under the somber sky he lay, no more than a baffled assassin.

Hobart's thoughts were busy. If the fellow had indeed died by act of Heavy Hand, that creature of mystery had again given practical proof of his good will. True, he had not appeared openly, but he had saved Hobart's life, nevertheless.

When engaged with Ruric, the young man had not suspected another Danite was near, yet Yusef had been advancing to deal a fatal blow. Midway, he was stopped by the knife of Heavy Hand.

"Creature of mystery!" muttered the young man, "what am I to make of you? So far I am puzzled, but had I no other work to attend to, I would find out who you are, if such a thing is possible. You have saved my life at least once, but you flit away like a phantom. Did I really see and talk with you in Lockdale's house, or was my ally's statement all a fiction? That is what I would like to know—but I have other work to do!"

He turned abruptly away, and strode toward Brooke's. The eventful night was drawing to a close, and as he knew the merchant would be feeling anxious, he resolved to join him as soon as possible.

No further adventures delayed him by the way, and he soon arrived at his destination.

No fresh calamity had befallen house or household, but he found the former barricaded as for a siege. Percy had returned and reported that Hobart was probably captured, and his more energetic father had taken measures to resist to the last.

The return of Roger was hailed by him with joy, however, and Percy echoed all he said. Hobart's lips curled with scorn. He did not suspect that young Brooke had sold his soul for a price he might never collect, but he did think him a weak, if not cowardly, character.

Lillian Allen had recovered from the effects of the drug administered to her, but could give no light on the subject. She and Edna had retired as usual, and the last thing she remembered was that they were talking together. From this it seemed probable that the somnific had been wafted to them on the air, and had caused a quiet lapse from consciousness, but how the abductor had gained admission to the room and how he had taken Edna away so strangely was not to be explained by any ordinary course of reasoning.

Miss Allen gave her active mind to the consideration of the perplexing question, "Where now is Edna?" but without any result so far as solving the mystery was concerned. She declared that there was no other lover in the case, and, beyond that, there was room for no well-grounded surmises.

Where was Edna?

It was the subject they discovered in every way, but discovered in vain, and the remainder of the night wore away and left them as much in the dark as ever.

Percy Brooke was sitting by the window, two hours after daylight, gazing out in an absent way. He looked pale, baggared and wretched. He would have given a good deal—all that lay in his power—could he have gone back a week in his life, or even twenty-four hours; back beyond the time when he sold his soul to the Mormons.

He was haunted by the memory of Locke Kellogg, or by his ghost. He thought it was the latter; common sense bids us take the view that it was the former. Be that as it may, he saw, in imagination, the pale, accusing face of the man he had betrayed to his death, wherever he went.

And he saw now, if never before, that his chances of winning Lillian Allen were few. She regarded him with cousinly toleration, if not with cousinly love, but the idea of becoming his wife had never occurred to her, and, if broached then, would have shocked her.

All her thoughts were on Locke Kellogg and his mysterious absence, and she asked herself again and again if harm had come to him; if aught had occurred which was fated to crush her heart and ruin her life.

Until woman's love grows weaker and less forgetful than it is, Percy Brooke's chances of profiting by his crime are not brilliant.

Looking out of the window Percy suddenly started, and it seemed to him that his blood congealed in his veins. A man was walking leisurely toward the front door and to his horror he recognized John Hughson.

At that moment he did not remember that Lockdale's "prime minister" had often been there in the past; he remembered only the fact that the man might, if he chose, tell how Kellogg had been betrayed.

Further thought convinced him there was little danger he would thus tell, and he had grown outwardly calm by the time Mr. Hughson entered. The latter had never been more at his ease, and he nodded to each and all with the gay good will of one who considers himself a welcome guest. He was the most plausible of

those near Lockdale's throne; a prime minister by nature and in fact.

"I hope I see you all well," he cheerily said.

"You find us in sore trouble," Wallace Brooke gloomily replied, while Hobart, who sat just inside an adjoining room, listened attentively.

"Indeed!" said Hughson, his face growing grave, as that of a true friend should. "What is wrong?"

"Edna is gone!"

"Eh?"

"I repeat, Edna is gone."

"Gone where?"

"Heaven knows; I don't!"

The merchant spoke with gloomy bitterness, but John Hughson looked at him searchingly, his manner indicating a shadow of unbelief.

"I have just come from Elder Lockdale," he said, "who sends a message concerning Miss Brooke. He said he would do himself the honor of calling later in the day."

"He may as well stay away," Brooke answered. "Edna is gone, and Lockdale will not find her here if he comes."

"Then he will find her elsewhere," Hughson coolly replied.

CHAPTER XII.

TWO VISITORS AT BROOKE'S.

THE coolness of Lockdale's "prime minister" might have surprised Hobart had he not already been aware that the man knew of Edna's disappearance, while, even as it was, it gave rise to the mental query whether he did not know more about her whereabouts than had been supposed.

"What can be done?" Brooke gloomily asked, in response to Hughson's last remark.

"Wait a little. I have heard of Miss Brooke's sudden disappearance. Have you no idea where she has gone?"

The prime minister looked keenly at Brooke. "Not the slightest," the latter replied.

"Has she intimate friends in Paradise Gulch?"

"No."

"Nor means of leaving the town?"

"None whatever."

"What about this Roger Hobart?"

"He is as ignorant as I am, and has been with me all the while since early last night."

"He was once a suitor for Miss Brooke's hand?" continued Hughson, as though all other suitors went off the track when Asa Lockdale came on.

"Ye-es," slowly admitted Brooke, glancing toward the door where Roger was listening, but still unseen.

"Might he not have abducted her out of revenge?"

The merchant was for a moment puzzled to tell why Hobart should seek revenge, but as he perceived that Mr. Hughson was viewing the matter from the standpoint that Edna belonged to Lockdale, and to him alone, he thought it wise to follow the current.

"No; that's not Roger's way. He's my friend still. He—a—he accepts the inevitable."

"And is willing to give Edna up?" pursued Hughson, looking sharply at the merchant.

Mr. Brooke felt that the ground was rocking under his feet; he even suspected his head was rocking above his feet.

"His mind has never wavered since I gave him my ultimatum," he managed to say.

"In plain words, you told him Edna was to marry Elder Lockdale?" said Hughson.

"I kept nothing back," said Brooke, wiping his damp forehead, and wishing a mine would explode and blow the prime minister up among the stars, thereby ending the cross-examination.

"Do you think he bears the elder any ill will?"

"He did at first, but his feelings gradually changed, and then he agreed to abide by my decision."

"Very good!" said the visitor, cheerfully. "Edna shall become Mrs. Lockdale, and Hobart shall be present at the happy and solemn ceremony."

"Will it take place before Edna is found?"

The inquiry came from Lillian Allen. Naturally of a spirited and impulsive nature, she was disgusted at the idea of sitting there and hearing Hughson assume so much. It might be policy to keep silent, but she felt little like doing so.

The prime minister smiled.

"You are witty, Miss Allen."

"You mistake, sir. I asked for information."

"To ridicule me, you mean," said Hughson, smiling blandly, but with a latent glitter in his eyes which was not at all prepossessing.

"You mistake, Mr. Hughson," said the merchant, hastily. "Lillian would not ridicule my guest; she intended only a jest, in a girlish way."

"Do you imagine I resent it? Not at all, my dear sir; not at all. I esteem Miss Allen too highly to be offended at anything she may say."

The prime minister bowed and smiled, but a chill fell over Lillian's heart. She partially read the meaning of that look, and she would have given much to go by one bold movement for-

ever from Mormon-land. If the elder had his eye on Edna, his prime minister had his on Lilian.

Percy read the looks, and tone, too, and he set his teeth and glared his anger. He had sold his soul for the love of Lilian Allen, and now the man who had insidiously led him on was daring to look with an admiring eye at her.

The elder Brooke managed to get conversation out of the dangerous channel, and Hughson soon took his departure. He had merely called because Asa Lockdale could not fully accept the idea that Edna was gone, and gone without the knowledge of her family.

The prime minister had been sent to use his eyes and wits, but he had used them so well that he was satisfied that her disappearance had been as mysterious as was claimed by the Brookes.

So, after telling the merchant that she should be restored to him, Hughson went away.

He left the little party deeper in perplexity than ever. They knew not which way to turn. The idea of flight was no longer to be considered, though the men vainly wished Lilian was in a place of safety. For their own part they would remain and search for Edna, and fight for her, while they had life left in their bodies.

So said all of them, and Roger and the elder Brooke, at least, were sincere. Percy, too, was angry. He did not share the ideas of the others. From the time he knew Edna was gone, he had never wavered in the belief that the elder had kidnapped her.

The talk which had given Hobart a different opinion he regarded as made to order, and on purpose to deceive him. The Mormons were capable of anything.

"Yes," he argued, "Lockdale has Edna, and John Hughson has his evil eye on Lilian. I have schemed and sinned for nothing. I was made a tool of to lure Locke Kellogg to his death, and now it's done I am to be thrown overboard, and Hughson will take Lilian—if he can. By the fiends! I'll kill him if he tries it!"

The poor fool clinched his hand and raised it aloft, and for awhile there was a battle-fire in his eyes, but it soon faded and his hand fell.

Mentally and physically he was a child compared to Hughson, and the latter had behind him all the powers of Paradise Gulch. It would be an unequal fight.

"I had as well be dead!" said Percy, gloomily. "I am in the toils, and the ghost of Kellogg haunts me. Why was I fool enough to take part in that deed? Why? It was Hughson's work; he led me on. But why? What was the object? I cannot see what motive he had."

Rest easy, Percy Brooke; all will be made clear to you sooner, by far, than you wish. It is not the way of Hughson, nor of those he serves to move without an object.

The day passed without event of importance, though by no means in idleness. Search for Edna Brooke was diligently made. Hobart and Percy went as a pair, but whenever they searched they found other men doing the same.

If they turned a corner, they met Barwolf; if they turned back, they met Harrod. The one stalked like a trooper, big, strong and lofty; the other glided like a tiger. The one made a sweep of his hand, like a military salute, when he saw the lone pair; the other never raised the drooping head, and if the black eyes were raised for a moment, they soon fell, as though mysterious, somber Harrod hoped to see the trail of the missing girl outlined with mastodon footprints.

Yet all the searchers failed, and, at dusk, Edna remained unfound. Elder Lockdale had come over in his carriage and reported that every house in the town had been vainly searched.

Where, then, was Edna?

The mystery grew deeper, darker. The guards set about the town firmly declared no one had passed out that night. Then, where was Edna? She could not vanish into air, nor sink into the ground. Yet, it was said she had neither left Paradise Gulch nor was then there.

Naturally, the two parties began to suspect each other. The Mormon elder, ignorant of the girl's whereabouts, decided that her real friends had concealed her somewhere; her real friends, having no other idea open to them, believed Lockdale had stolen her, after all.

It was an hour after dark, and Hobart had just announced that he was going to again enter the elder's house and see what could be learned, when a step sounded at the door and a man calmly walked into the room and helped himself to a chair.

"How d'ye dew?" he inquired, nonchalantly, before any one else could gather speech; and then he leaned back in his chair, cradled one knee in his clasped hands and looked across them at Wallace Brooke.

He was, apparently, a man of about fifty years, and of a personal appearance which reminded Hobart of the typical pictures of "Uncle Sam," as used to represent the United States.

He was tall and angular, in places, and ridiculously dressed in a long, brass-buttoned coat of blue, with a white vest and baggy white pants, while under a tall, white hat was a

shrewd face which was not likely to take any prize for beauty, but which did not appear to be that of a stupid man. Long hair and a generous-sized goatee, both of a yellowish hue, made up his most noticeable points.

Verily, Brother Jonathan seemed to have dropped in upon them unannounced.

It was some time before Wallace Brooke could find speech, but when he did, he assured the unexpected visitor that they were all well.

"That's good news; proper good," said Jonathan, "fur I allow yew hev got tew a pint where yew need tew be wal, an' spy, an' chipper, an' about as wal as they make them, anyhow."

"What're you talking about?" curtly asked Brooke.

"Yewr danger."

"Our danger? What do you mean?"

"Wal, yew see I'm nigh abowt a straunger in taown, fur I only dropped in this mornin', but I've picked up some bits o' news by the way, an' I think I kin prove interestin' tew yew."

"How so?" asked Brooke, for, under the visitor's exterior, was an air which impressed them more than the words had done.

"Wal, yew see I'm nigh abowt jest from New England, where I lived at Peach Trees, an' I guess I've got abowt the correct idee o' life an' sech things. I don't b'lieve in Mormonism, nur a plurality o' wives, nur nothin' o' the sort. I was once blessed with *one* wife, an' I got all I wanted o' the gentle sex, an' I allow a man who wants a whole addition-table o' crinoline must be out o' his head a good deal, by mighty. But that ain't hyar nur thar. I dropped in 'cause o' a confab I chanced tew overhear."

"What did you hear?" Roger impatiently asked.

Jonathan turned his gaze mildly upon him.

"Yew are jest the man tew be interested in what I heerd; leastwise, ef yewr name is Hobart."

"It is. What of me?"

"There's them," said Jonathan, waving his long forefinger like a flag of distress, "that hev a grudge ag'in' yew, an' they hev agreed that yew are one tew many in this happy family; thar'fore, they mean tew chuck yew owit."

"What do you mean by this rubbish?" Brooke demanded, but Roger had studied Jonathan more closely, and had come to the conclusion that he was a man not to be laughed at, or despised.

"Who is the man, or who are the men, who have such unbecoming sentiments toward me?" he asked.

"Wal, I can't see as there is more than one, but one there is, an' it's the chief scalawag o' ther addition-table crowd—him that ther scribes an' Pharisees o' ther New Zion call Elder Lockdale!"

CHAPTER XIII.

HARROD ASSERTS HIS AUTHORITY.

SUSPICIOUS and inquiring looks were directed toward Brother Jonathan from all sides, but he sat as calm and self-possessed under the survey as though he had no interest whatever in the matter.

In vain Roger Hobart studied him; he was unable to tell what manner of a man they had stumbled upon. He might be saint or sinner, or like common men, a good deal of each, so far as his appearance went.

He was, however, questioned more closely, and he stated that his name was Abijah Miffin, that he was a native of a New England town called Peach Trees, but that he had for several years been a wanderer over the West.

He had "dropped" on Paradise Gulch, without knowing anything about it, but, as he observed, he soon learned that it was an "addition-table town," and, close on the heels of this discovery came the alleged conversation in which he heard that one Roger Hobart was to be kidnapped—how, he did not know.

"But, ez sech a thing is contrary tew ther moral code o' Peach Trees, an' I don't take no great amount o' stock in these addition-table folks, anyhow, I come right over tew see yew an' give yew warnin'."

Mr. Miffin beamed refulgently on the audience which was regarding him so suspiciously, but it did not have the effect of thawing out their hearts. They had decided that they had no friend in Paradise Gulch, and could not have any, and they were inclined to regard Abijah as a man come like a wolf to the fold.

For a long time he was cross-examined, but he persisted in his assertion that he was a stranger in the place; and the only result of the inquisition was to show that he was either a very good-natured man or a villain who could afford to assume good nature to work his purpose.

Wallace Brooke was inclined to tell him that he could go as soon as he saw fit, and to eject him if he did not obey; but Roger made a motion which materially changed the merchant's plans, and Abijah was allowed to remain.

Hobart and Brooke seized the first chance to speak privately together.

"I see you do not like our new friend," said the former.

"I think I see the hand of Lockdale in his coming."

"Why? Surely, when we are in any case practically in the elder's power, he has no need to place tools inside the house," Roger argued.

"He may think Edna is here and concealed."

"Possibly."

"It is something more than chance that this drawling Yankee came here at this particular time; I believe he is a thorough fraud."

"And I am inclined to believe in him, his beloved 'Peach Trees,' and his whole story. At any rate, I request you to give him an invitation to stop with us. If he is honest, and really opposed to the Mormons, he will be a valuable ally, for he is strong and shrewd."

"We shall have to watch him."

"Of course, but that is just what I wish to do. Give me the task, and I will soon report to you whether or not our friend from Peach Trees can be trusted."

Brooke yielded to the younger man's argument and the die was cast, for Mr. Miffin, when invited, did not refuse to make his home temporarily with the family. He did them the honor of saying they reminded him of the "folks at Peach Trees," and that seemed the highest praise he could give.

In a quiet way he began to pick up points on the situation, and, before they were hardly aware of it, he knew nearly as much about their troubles as they did themselves. He at once became interested and took Roger aside.

"I want tew say I'm in this game up tew my collar-bone, an' I go in bull hog or nothin', Peach Trees fashion. If thar is any fightin' tew be did yew kin depend on me tew be 'round, an' yew shall see I kin hev a double-tooth pulled an' never screech. That's my style. Dew yew ketch oh?"

"I catch on to what you say," Roger replied.

"Wal, yew kin ketch on tew what I dew by waitin' a bit. We never go round a bigger field o' grass than we kin mow down, at Peach Trees, an' yew will find me right 'round. That's an uncommon purty gal, over thar."

Abijah had abruptly pointed to Lilian.

"The Danites are dangerous men," observed Roger, avoiding the subject.

"She's about my style."

"They know how to use knife and revolver."

"She looks fit to embrace."

"And when they strike, they usually add one to their graveyard."

Miffin burst into a hearty laugh.

"Ef you're detarmined tew talk Danite, I won't talk gal," he said, "though she is purty—but, never mind. Yes, sirree, them Danites is tough cusses, ef I may say so emphaticly express myself, an' it wouldn't s'prise me one bit ef we had hot times afore mornin'. We had better buckle on the armor o' caution, an' watch by the port-cornwallis with the sword o' grit. I'll go about among the brothers an' sisters an' cheer them up a bit."

Mr. Miffin carried out his idea and talked with each of the defenders separately. Had he been a dear friend of the family, he could not have made himself more at home. He seemed to think he was there to fill a very large niche in the household, and he filled as much space, in a certain style, as any man could have done.

Still, even such unfailing good-humor and courage as his could not dispel the gloom which had fallen over the others. They knew danger was in the air; the cloud which had temporarily receded when Edna was abducted came down thicker and heavier now it was known Roger Hobart was wanted by the Danites.

His loss would take away the strongest support of the imperiled little party.

Wallace Brooke was grave, sad and almost inclined to despair; Percy was erratic and nervous; Lilian, thoughtful and spiritedly brave, by turns; Hobart, calm and resolute; while Miffin was as much at ease as though he directed the fortunes of a thousand men.

Percy felt oppressed and stifling, and, under plea of making a reconnaissance, he sought the outer air, but he soon had cause to regret it, for Harrod, the spy, dropped on him with hawk-like quickness.

"I am glad to see you," said Harrod.

Percy repressed a groan and muttered something about a "mutual pleasure."

"I have been watching for you," the spy added. "Who is the new member of your household?"

"How did you know there was one?"

"Bah! are the Danites blind? There are few things they do not know. Men do not come or go unseen by the Sons of Dan. Do not imagine we look and see not. Who is the man, I ask?"

"I don't know."

"Beware! Remember you are now one of us."

"I am not one of you!" said Percy, with sudden courage, and then he became amazed at his own rashness.

Harrod laid his hand on his arm with a touch as light as that of a woman, yet it seemed to the poor fool that a mountain of lead had touched him instead.

"Look!" said the spy. "I am Harrod, a Danite, a son of fire, and heat, and flame. I

am of the grandest order known to men. In Paradise Gulch our religion is different from that at Salt Lake City, and so is the Order of Dan. I am in the inner circle, and I know how the wheels of the Order move. You came to us and sold one of your tribe to our blood-men. The deed was done. From that hour you were one of us; I repeat it, one of us. You can never be otherwise. You are a veritable son of fire!"

By this time Percy was wrought to a pitch of nervousness which seemed liable to at any moment to drive him to some rash act which would harm himself more than any one else. Absurd as the words of the Danite seemed on the surface, when he talked of his Order, he had a way which reminded men of a strong, sullen, slow but resistless serpent coiling himself leisurely about his victims. Each sentence was a coil, and those who were fairly in it felt as though afflicted with the nightmare.

"Enough!" Percy managed to ejaculate, breaking the silence. "What do you want?"

"How do you know I want aught?"

"You are not here for nothing. Speak on!"

"We want Hobart."

"Hobart!"

"Yes."

"What is that to me?"

"A good deal."

"Why so?"

"Because you must deliver him into our hands!"

The great, black eyes of the spy looked steadily, magnetically, into those of his companion, but Percy felt that it was the time for him to resist, to attempt to deny the spy's claim to absolute ownership of him.

"I will not have any part of it!" he declared.

"Then I will go to Wallace Brooke and the girl, Lillian, and tell them how Locke Kellogg died!"

Harrod's reply came with instantaneous promptness, and Percy groaned aloud and dropped his hands helplessly by his side. He was completely in the power of his companion.

"Which shall it be?" Harrod added.

"Great heavens! how can I choose! There is no choice. You have me helplessly in the web; it is for you to direct. What now do you want?" was the reckless inquiry.

"We want Hobart."

"What can I do?"

"Admit us, when the house grows quiet, so that we may take him away and silence him forever!"

It was half an hour later when Percy rejoined the family inside the house. He kept his face in shadow, and avoided speaking more than was necessary, but he could not drive away the haunting demons which hovered over him.

The specter of Kellogg seemed to his weak mind to be ever beside him, and when Hobart spoke it merely reminded him that he was about to betray him as he had betrayed another man.

And the eventful night wore slowly away.

CHAPTER XIV.

EDNA MEETS A QUEEN.

"WHERE am I?"

It was an inquiry said to be particularly that of a woman, and in the present case it was certainly a woman who uttered it.

He was in a small, bare room which boasted of neither carpet, wall-paper nor whitewash; whose sole furniture consisted of a bed, a table and two chairs. On the table stood a tallow candle, the feeble light of which only served to make the blackness of the walls more pronounced.

On the bed lay a woman, young, pretty, confused; and when she asked the question with which the present chapter opens, she looked about in a puzzled way.

The young woman was Edna Brooke, but how she came in the somber, ugly room she now beheld, she had no idea. She had gone to sleep in her own apartment, as usual; she awoke—where?

After a moment devoted to wonder and perplexity, she remembered the proposal of Asa Lockdale and the fear she had felt of a manifestation from the Danites, and she sprang off the bed.

Surely her worst fears had been realized or she would not be there. Did it not look like an abduction?

Once on her feet she looked eagerly about, but the room gave no encouragement and few points. Plain and black, it was more like a prison-cell than anything else.

Edna resolved to let no time go to waste, and she took the lamp and began a tour of inspection. It revealed nothing. There was one door, but it had neither latch nor knob, and opened inwardly, and she could not move it. Doubtless it was fastened on the other side.

The girl sat down in a chair and repeated her old inquiry: "Where am I?" with renewed bewilderment.

She could not understand it at all. She was dimly conscious that she must have been taken away from her own room while asleep, though she did not see how it could be done, and con-

veyed to where she now was, but that did not explain *where* she was.

She was shrewd enough to decide, even then, that if Asa Lockdale was the abductor, he had taken a very odd course. A sagacious suitor would not think of giving his enchantress such quarters until gentler means had been tried and found unavailing.

It did not look as though Lockdale had a hand in the matter, and yet, who else would kidnap her?

Whoever had done it, Edna was willing to believe she was in serious trouble. She had fallen asleep expecting trouble; she had awakened and found it. Its nature, however, seemed strange and mysterious, and she knew not what to think. Was she really in Lockdale's power? It did not seem probable. Her quarters were not those to which the elder would convey one he intended to make the light of his harem.

Once more she arose and went to the door. This time she rapped upon it, hoping for a response from some one. She had rather know the truth than remain longer in suspense.

There was no response, and once more she made a round of the room. The result convinced her she was a prisoner. The door was fastened, and there was no other means of exit. The place was windowless, though fresh air seemed to enter at some point above her head.

More than ever perplexed, she sat down to meditate and reflect. She lacked the strong will of Lillian Allen, though braver herself, perhaps, than the average woman, and was inclined to feel in a state akin to despair.

She thought of her home, of her father, of Lillian, of Roger Hobart, and tears fell from her eyes. When would she see them again? What would be the end of her adventure? For what terrible purpose had she been stolen from that home?

Home! The word never seems to express so much, to stand for so much that is dear and sacred, as when we are forced away from it. Going willingly, some may even sneer at its homely looks and ways, but the exile sees the golden coin of the heart in every nook and corner.

Another hour passed, and then, without warning, Edna had company in the room. She looked up quickly, hearing a slight sound. The door was closed as before, but another person, a woman, was in the place.

Edna started to her feet and looked in surprise, for the new-comer was a strange and somewhat forbidding-looking person. More than that, she looked like a fit subject for an insane asylum.

Tall and slight she seemed, though her peculiar style of dress would add to the impression—and it was a dress worthy of more than a passing remark. One garment covered her from chin to feet; a long, black wrapper, which left little to be told beyond that. On her head she wore a crown made of some sort of stiff paper—a clumsy affair, which doubtless had a thought of royalty about it, but which was an absurd mockery. From under it fell golden hair, which descended over her shoulders, making a border of gold for the ebon robe it covered.

The woman's face was rather small, and was pale, sad, refined and gentle.

If there was an element about the crown which spoke of a deranged mind, the face served to offset any fears Edna might have had, and it was not without eagerness that she addressed the new-comer:

"Lady, I am glad to see you."

She would have said more, but, as the words trembled on her lips, the unknown interrupted with a gracious wave of her hand.

"Say no more, fair subject. Let us for to-day forget that I am a queen, and let us meet as women."

The words did not surprise Edna, for they were no more wild than the idea of wearing a crown, and the gentleness of the tone encouraged the girl.

"I shall be pleased to have your friendship," she quickly replied, resolved to humor the other's whim, but she made a mistake even at the beginning.

"Have I not already proved that you have it?" asked the stranger, reproachfully.

"Certainly!" Edna hastened to say. "That is—lady, I do not understand in the least how I came here. Will you explain the mystery?"

"I brought you here to foil Asa Lockdale."

"Here? And where are we?"

"Why, don't you know? This is Windsor Palace, and I am Queen Victoria. I supposed you would surmise that at the first. Never mind, however; we are one in hating the arch-enemy, Lockdale."

"Did you say you brought me here?"

"I did, young lady."

"Who helped you?"

"No one."

Victoria spoke as though the matter was one of the easiest kind, but, though Edna remembered nothing about her change of quarters, she felt sure she had not walked, and it was absurd to suppose the delicate woman before her had carried even so light a burden.

"Are we far from my father's?"

"I do not know. Distances are all alike to me. Once I could calculate clearly, but since I became an inmate of Lockdale's house, there seems to be something wrong with my head."

She pressed her hand upon her forehead and looked grave and perplexed.

"Are you really an inmate of the elder's house?"

"I am wife Number One," Victoria gravely answered. "I am the legal, the first wife of the king of Paradise Gulch; I am a queen."

Edna grew troubled. Such company did not seem in the least degree desirable.

"Is Lockdale near here?" she continued.

"I cannot tell. Wife Number One is no longer a favorite. King Lockdale tired of me, and he thought to murder me as he had murdered many a helpless victim before. But he did not succeed. I fled from him, and came here. I go to see him no more, and we can never meet as friends. Do not ask me where he is. I know not, and I care not. If the chance ever comes, I shall array my forces against his, however."

Victoria spoke with the grave meditation of a veritable queen perplexed by business and State secrets, but Edna grew impatient, as she did not progress at all toward learning her situation.

"When can you take me to my father—to Mr. Brooks?" she asked, gently.

"Hal you remind me that I came with a purpose. We will go at once, for there is that which we should see. Hal! hal! there is always something we should see. And so we will go on the trail of discovery. Did you know a man named Rudolph?"

Edna replied negatively.

"He thought to kill me once. Lockdale sent him to my chamber, and there was murder in his heart. He was a villain, and he would unhesitatingly do his master's bidding. But what a change soon took place. Rudolph was dead, and I walked out of the Mormon's house. At one movement I abandoned my position as queen—for queens' heads are not always safe—and became what I am now, Lockdale's enemy. Come, let us go!"

There was no doubt but the fair-haired woman was deranged, Edna thought, but there was nothing in her manner or words which alarmed Edna, and she resolved to follow her. One more attempt she made to learn just where she was, and to have the self-styled Victoria start her on the homeward road, but when they had failed she accepted the inevitable as philosophically as possible.

They left the room, and the dim light of the candle, which the elder woman carried, fell on bare, stone walls. The air was damp and earthy, too, and Edna was convinced that they were below the surface of the ground.

Her guide turned to the left and led the way through the same passage, which seemed endless.

Once Edna was tempted to turn and improve her chance of flight, but she knew not what was behind her, and somehow felt that the presence of this mind-darkened woman was a protection to her.

After a considerable time the passage ended at what seemed a solid wall of masonry, but at a touch of Victoria's hand the wall glided upward, revealing a vacant space beyond.

CHAPTER XV.

VICTORIA'S BOLD MOVE.

THE adventure was of a character which was far from pleasing to Edna, and she felt a strong inclination to retreat again, but it seemed probable it would only be to return to her prison, and she forced herself to assume a composed, if not a brave, air.

But the passage, with its damp air and earthy smell, and the dull, brown-stone walls, with the candle flickering a feeble light over all and conjuring up ghostly forms—these were not attractive features.

And what lay beyond the secret door so mysteriously moved? Edna wavered, but the guide turned around, and the light of the candle showed her face unusually gentle.

"Are you afraid, child?" she asked.

"Not of you, for I am sure you are my friend; but are you sure we shall not encounter some danger we cannot overcome?"

"You may rely on me," Victoria replied. "My brain is not so turned but I can still care for myself and my friends. Have no fear. Come!"

She stepped through the passageway, and Edna followed without further words; there was a click behind them and the secret door fell into place; and then they were fairly launched on their expedition, be it what it might.

Once more Edna looked sharply about her. They seemed to be in a sort of cellar, where gigantic pillars stood around like sentinels on duty, but real signs of life were wanting and Edna saw no occasion to be alarmed.

On the contrary, she began to hope the journey would take her to the outer air and to liberty.

Victoria walked on steadily, and they soon reached and ascended a flight of stone steps. Passing a door they were in a place as strong

and architecturally severe as some Government building, and Edna was filled with wonder.

An explanation was soon offered, however.

Her guide paused at one point where Edna now saw that a second light joined its rays with those of their own, and pointed beyond.

"Look inside!" she said.

The girl obeyed. A strong room, which was almost like a cell, was revealed, with bearded men lounging around it in various free-and-easy styles. Edna might have been filled with wonder as to who they were, but among them she saw one familiar face.

It was that of Barwolf, the chief of the Destroying Angels; the centurion of the Sons of Dan!

Edna recoiled in actual terror, believing she had been purposely betrayed into the power of the Danites. She would have fled along the hall, but the hand of her companion closed firmly over her shoulder and kept her where she was. At the same moment, Victoria's voice breathed in her ear:

"Be calm!"

It was not the words so much as the manner of the woman, but Edna did, indeed, feel that she had made a mistake; that there had been no betrayal; and she stood more composedly while her guide added:

"I showed you these wretches merely to let you see where we are. We are in the house, the stronghold, of Asa Lockdale. Discovery here means death to me; perhaps worse to you. It all depends on whether you wish to link your fate forever with that of Lockdale."

"Heaven forbid!" breathed the girl.

"Ha! ha! We do not love him, do we, my fair subject? Queen and subject are alike; they hate the King of Paradise Gulch. Well, then let us be cautious. One rash movement will doom us, and it was to impress the fact on your mind that I showed you the Danites."

"I realize it fully, but why are we here? Let us leave the house while we can."

"No!"

"You say it is death to remain."

"Death to be discovered, I said, fair subject. But I do not intend to be discovered; I will not be if you are prudent. Will you be that? Will you avoid rash words and deeds which will betray us?"

Edna felt that she was helpless. Escape from the elder's house unaided she could not: it might be no more than a mad freak which had sent Victoria there, and which would eventually ruin them both, but there seemed no way just then except to go on and trust to luck and the woman's sagacity—or mad cunning.

"I promise," Edna therefore replied.

"Good! Then we will go on. Wife Number One will show her sometime master that even the worm can turn at bay when hard pressed. Come!"

The girl reluctantly followed and was led on through several passages until another light appeared not far ahead, and Victoria extinguished her own. Edna was trembling, for she expected every moment to see some grim, red-handed Danite spring up in their path, but the mad "queen" was perfectly calm. She went forward, and as they neared the light it was plain to see it was from a door.

Victoria boldly advanced and looked inside.

"Empty!" she said, calmly. "We will enter."

And they passed inside.

Edna was scarcely prepared for what she saw. The room was furnished in fine style. The heavy carpet, costly furniture, tinted walls, costly paintings and, in fact, the entire outfit, was of a style the girl had never before seen in Utah; and the flood of light sent out from a dozen suspended lamps served to place the scene at its best.

She was given little time for thought, for Victoria hurried her across the room. There she opened a small door, and Edna saw a common closet.

"Enter!" Victoria pursued.

Again the girl hesitated. She had no desire to shut herself in such narrow quarters. True, there was room enough, for the present, but the door, oddly enough, was of mere lattice-work, and the closet would prove a veritable prison, if nothing worse, if any one entered the room.

She was about to decline going further in this blindfold game when a step sounded outside the door, and Victoria started with what seemed real alarm.

"It is Lockdale!" she exclaimed. "Will you enter, or remain here and be discovered at once?"

The step came nearer, and Edna could hesitate no longer; in a choice between two evils, she resolved to take that which seemed the least.

She entered the closet, and her guide followed and pulled the door together in front of them.

In a moment more, looking through the lattice-work, they saw Asa Lockdale enter. He came in with a hasty step, and they saw that there was a frown on his usually placid brow. Something had plainly gone wrong with the King of Paradise Gulch.

Edna trembled violently, and the arm of her ally stole around her waist. It could not, how-

ever, console or reassure her at that moment. She feared Asa Lockdale as she would a tiger, and it seemed that she had walked into his very clutches by simply obeying the freak of a mad-woman.

The elder flung himself into a chair, and then another step sounded and Barwolf appeared.

He saluted respectfully, but the elder looked at him as though he longed to fling some missile at his head.

"Don't let this happen again!" he said. "You should know that when you have been out on an important mission it is your duty to report to me at once on your return."

"It was because I had nothing to report that I failed to come to you, my master," Barwolf answered, still respectfully, but without any great show of fear.

"That is no excuse, and it must not occur again; but I will overlook it now. Well, what of the girl? Twenty-four hours have passed since she disappeared—don't tell me there is no clew to her!"

"If I report correctly, I must; there is no clew."

The elder smote one hand on the table. "Have the Danites become bats that they cannot see when the sun is shining?" he cried.

"My master, we have done our best, and if Wallace Brooke, or any of his family, really know where his daughter is, we hope to capture her soon. We are proceeding according to the plan before mentioned."

"But if Edna is in her father's house, where have they hidden her?"

"That's what perplexes me, my master."

"Everything perplexes you nowadays," said the elder, surlily. "I begin to lose confidence in you. Where is wife Number One?"

Victoria started so violently that Edna was alarmed, but the movement escaped notice.

"I really don't know," admitted Barwolf.

"Exactly. Your sleuth-hounds can now find no one and nothing. This house is built like an old-time castle. There is positively no way for people to go and come unknown to me, or to your men. Yet, Number One walked out, leaving only a dead man behind to tell of her departure."

"I have told you he died by the act of Heavy Hand," the centurion somewhat stiffly persisted.

"Ay, and you thereby remind me of another mystery. There is a curse over Paradise Gulch. Men die strangely, here, there, everywhere. All are of the Sons of Dan. I order you to solve the mystery of their deaths, and arrest their slayer, but you merely say that there is a mysterious, weird, uncanny man, woman or thing—which?—that is doing all this slaughter. You call him, she, or it, Heavy Hand. Well, why don't you catch Heavy Hand? And why don't you find Edna Brooke? You know she has not left the city, or our numerous guards would have seen her go. Then, why don't you find her? Why don't you solve one of the many mysteries which I have given you to solve?"

The elder poured forth this series of question and general denunciation in a bitter voice, and it was plain he was in a very ill humor—so much so that Edna wondered, and, wondering, shivered, what would be the result if he discovered her.

CHAPTER XVI.

ELDER LOCKDALE IS HUMBLLED.

BARWOLF had taken his reproof with a measure of visible regret, but it was not in his centurion nature to shed many tears over any one's anger, and he shifted his weight from one foot to the other with an air of composure.

"It's a pity matters should have turned out so, but all can't go as we wish, even in the New Zion. I am as sorry as you that things are by the ears, but I'd remind you that only twenty-four hours have gone by since all these things happened. The world was not made in a minute, and the Sons of Dan can't do superhuman things. Trust me to conquer in the end. Did you ever know me to fail?"

The centurion's calm and reasonable reply served to extinguish the fires of his master's anger, and he at once came down to common-sense. He knew very well that there was no other man in Utah who would, or could, serve him as faithfully as Barwolf had done, and, despite his long experience as an "addition-table" king, Asa felt a little ashamed of himself.

He spoke civilly, and asked the Danite chief to do what he could, and then the latter left the room.

Lockdale was alone; alone, but not unwatched. As he applied himself to his papers he little suspected that two of the persons he so much desired to find were even then within twenty feet of him.

One of them sincerely wished she was not there. The closet which protected them was but a scant protection; the lattice-door was little more than a skeleton. If the elder should come to that vicinity it seemed to her he would surely discover them, whether he opened the door or not.

If Victoria had any such fears she did not show them; she was as calm and steady as a statue.

Edna wished to ask how they were to escape from the closet, but she dared not trust her voice in the faintest whisper; it seemed sure to reach the acute ears of the elder and bring discovery upon them.

Lockdale began to write, and, for a while, the scratching of a very bad pen was the only audible sound.

Suddenly, however, Edna had a new and terrible start. The lattice-door receded, and as she put out her hand, quickly, to keep it in place, Victoria glided through and stood boldly in the room.

The elder had then but to turn his head and all would be revealed.

Edna was seized with a terrible weakness, and she nearly fell to the ground. She regarded all as lost. Her mad ally had thrown prudence to the winds and boldly dared everything. That ruin would come to them seemed sure. And she had not so much as a knife with which to defend herself!

Wife Number One crossed the floor with a light step until she reached the door; so light that Lockdale wrote on and did not suspect the explosion soon to take place.

His first warning came when the door closed with a bang and the key sent the bolt back with a click.

Then he turned, frowning, to see who had dared to intrude upon him, and Edna was so frightened and nervous that she could hardly keep herself from crying out:

"Lost! lost!"

But the elder did not proceed exactly as she had expected. He no sooner saw his doomed wife than he started back, the color retreating from his naturally sallow face, and a wild look appearing thereon.

"Asa Lockdale, Mormon, I bid you good-evening!"

It was the voice of wife Number One, cold, calm and tinged with latent sarcasm; but Asa, who had been accustomed to see her cower and blench at his frown, and to remain mute, or talk, as he willed, when in his awful presence, did not seem pleased in the least degree.

And yet he had sternly ordered Barwolf to produce her.

"Asa Lockdale, Mormon, you do not seem glad to see me," Victoria calmly continued.

The elder struggled with his emotion; he tried to act as should a man who held a village and its people in the hollow of his hand; and he did summon up a little fleeting courage. He spoke, trying to use the old, harsh style:

"On the contrary, I am glad to see you."

"You do not look it."

"I have been searching for you ever since last night."

"I heard you direct Rudolph to go to my room and kill me," Victoria coolly said.

"You did, eh?" growled the elder, into whose evil eyes a dangerous light was creeping.

"Yes, and Rudolph went to do your bidding."

"Well?"

"He has not yet done it!"

"You killed him, murderess!" Asa broke forth, hotly.

"So the killer was killed. Well, he deserved it, as much as any man ever deserved the gallows. It's a pity Rudolph could not have had his deserts in that direction. Yet, Asa Lockdale, Mormon, I did not kill your Danite."

"Who did, then?"

Wife Number One laughed lightly.

"If I know, I shall not tell. I am not here to be pumped for your benefit, sir."

"Perhaps you don't know all you're here for," said the elder, the evil light in his eyes growing stronger, "but I thank you for returning voluntarily, and, I assure you, you are very welcome. Your old apartment awaits."

He arose as he spoke, but Victoria put out one hand with an imperious gesture.

"Sit down, Asa Lockdale, Mormon. You need not call your tools, for I have come to see you alone, and no third party is wanted."

"I am the best judge of that."

"You are a judge of nothing. The day is past when I bowed and cringed to you, and obeyed your every whim because I dared not rebel. Since the hour when you vainly set you assassins upon me, and would have slain me without mercy, my nature has grown hard, and I have the will and the power to deal with you as you once dealt with me. Once more, Asa Lockdale, Mormon, sit down!"

"Not at your bidding!" he declared, a slight flush of anger showing on his sallow face, but not hiding the shadow of uneasiness. "I will not have you ranting here; I will call the men and have you removed."

He had taken two steps when a revolver flashed in the light and remained leveled at the elder.

Wife Number One might not be of iron, but she was perfectly calm, and the hand which held the weapon did not tremble in the least.

Asa fell back precipitately. He was a coward at heart, and though a woman's hand held the revolver, it was in itself enough to disturb him seriously.

"Come! come!" he exclaimed, hastily; "this won't do, you know."

"Why not?"

"I don't allow a member of my own family to draw a weapon upon me. Damage might result therefrom."

Wife Number One laughed bitterly.

"So it may, for I swear I will shoot you if I am driven to it; your miserable life would surely not be charged against whoever took it. Let us understand each other, Asa Lockdale, Mormon. I am no longer a member of your family, as you express it. I have cast off the iniquitous bond, and, escaping the assassin you set upon me, have started out in a new career. *I am now your bitter enemy*, and, standing here to-night, I tell you plainly that it will take but little to arouse me to the pitch of doing you mischief."

He saw her fingers working nervously on the butt of the revolver, and from his chair he put up a pair of argumentative hands. He was like a caged wolf that sees fit to hang out the white flag, but only awaits a chance to snap and snarl.

"I suppose you have a motive in coming here," he said, sullenly, after a pause.

"So I have, and I will proceed to business. Let me say, first, that you had better not summon your men. A touch of your bell would call them, for they are but just outside the door, but it would also seal your fate. If need be, I will shoot you and rid the world of a scourge."

Elder Asa Lockdale had never been more astonished. During the years he had known wife Number One, she had been meek, modest, retiring, sad and given to dolorous lamentations. Now, at one bound, as it were, she became a stern avenger.

What did it mean?

"I am ready to humor you," he said, ungraciously. "Say what you will!"

"Just what I intend to do, Asa Lockdale, Mormon, and I will carry your mind back along the past and show you what you may have forgotten; that your life and mine have been so blended that, as you have once observed to me, only death will sunder them. You are right, sir, but it will not be through the agency of an assassin's knife, directed at me, but by the triumph of justice."

"I will trouble you to go back, Asa Lockdale, Mormon, to the time when you and Clifton Bird were boyhood friends. Remember how you grew up together, companions in school and in all boyish sports, and how, when you graduated from the same place of learning, you swore undying friendship to each other. But all this is useless talk, unless the mention serves to show how idle and useless are men's vows, even to each other."

"Together you began the battle with the world, but it was a hard struggle and you soon became separated. Hundreds of miles stretched between you, but you continued to correspond, and the boyish vows were renewed in manhood again and again."

"Years passed; Clifton Bird died. Perhaps it was as well for him, for he had never been fortunate. Even his family relations had been unpleasant. It was because of this that he had been obliged to put his eldest daughter among strangers when she was but eight years old."

"The child grew up without knowing the love or care of parents. Those with whom she was placed were never unkind, but they were indifferent. The girl was, in a measure, forgotten by all, and she grew up more a child of nature than of man. This child, Blanche, the eldest daughter of Clifton Bird, *was myself!*"

CHAPTER XVII.

A MESSENGER FROM HEAVY HAND.

LOCKDALE showed deep impatience under this narrative. He was not likely to hear anything new to him, and he knew it would take the form of arraignment before she was through, but he would probably have seen the matter in a different light had he known there was another listener close at hand.

Edna, shrinking back in the closet, was dimly conscious that this narrative was as much for her benefit as for Lockdale's punishment, and she listened eagerly to hear the story of the woman, who now showed no signs of madness.

Still, she did not like her position, and she expected it would end disastrously to both herself and Victoria—or Blanche Bird, or whatever she should be called—and she listened for footsteps outside the room, and found the air of the closet growing terribly oppressive.

Elder Lockdale scowled at his wronged wife fiercely, vainly wishing for a weapon. Had he possessed the revolver she held her career would soon have come to a tragical end, but the Mormon's claws were for the time clipped and he must await a turn of fortune's wheel which would free him from his dilemma.

"Passing through the earlier years of my life as I did," continued Victoria, as we will still call the wronged wife, "I was chiefly wronged in that I was not made to look at the world as others saw it, and to know wherein lay its inconsistencies and hollowness. My

friends meant well, but their judgment was poor."

"When I was sixteen years of age news came to me that my father was dead, my mother having long before departed this life. I heard the news almost apathetically, for I had not seen him since I was eight, and at that time I did not know that his seeming neglect arose from the fact that he had been one whom misfortunes followed fast and followed faster."

"Some months later, Asa Lockdale, my father's old friend, appeared at my home and said he had been appointed my guardian by my dying father. I saw a man of middle age and plausible exterior, and when he used a fluent tongue, I was led to think well of him."

"Ah! well, I was a young, romantic and inexperienced girl, Asa Lockdale, Mormon, and when you said you would take me to a pleasant home I was glad to go—fool that I was!"

"For once, you tell the truth!" harshly interrupted the elder. "You were, and are, a fool!"

"Time will show which is the greater fool."

"Ay, and time will show you what it means to beard Elder Lockdale in his own quarters," and the man's lips curled back from his teeth in a wolfish way.

"You took me to Kansas, where we lived for a few months," the woman continued, "and then you told me I was to be your wife. My consent was never asked, and, God help me, it was never given; I remember, as the forms of a dream are remembered, the ceremony which made me your wife legally, though it was but a mockery."

"A year later we were in Utah. Your restless nature was always impelling you to move on toward the setting sun, and your evil genius led you to the land of the Mormons. I accompanied you, but I was no longer the ignorant girl of old. A year had sufficed to teach me more than the seventeen which preceded it, and I knew you as you were: a cold-blooded, heartless schemer. At nineteen, I had the practical years and troubles of one many years older than that."

"Once arrived at Salt Lake City, you pushed your fortunes as much as possible. You wormed your way into the good graces of the leaders of the Mormon Church, flattering and working them; you made money rapidly, somehow; and, adopting the customs of the people, you took other wives and became a shining light among the Mormons."

"I am glad you give me due credit," sneered Asa.

"I mean to do so, and, therefore, I will add that you soon aspired to overthrow all the rulers of the new government and become the head of the church yourself; that you laid plans to assassinate them and proclaim yourself king; but, just as your plot was ripening, Brigham Young tired of your ways, and, especially, of your radical Mormonism, and you were expelled from Salt Lake City."

"What was their loss was my gain."

"In a measure, you are right, for you left them all and founded Paradise Gulch, and here you have been an absolute ruler; and here you have surpassed all precedent and become a veritable Nero in your style of government. You would not be tolerated for a moment by the genuine Mormons."

"I can afford to laugh at that. But, you are growing tiresome, woman—"

"Wait! I am approaching the end, and I will now show the villainy of which you were guilty when you married me as you did. When Clifton Bird was dying, he sent for you to come to him. You went. I have reason to believe the meeting was a disappointment to him; he may have seen that his old school-fellow was not any longer a man of honor; but as he had no choice in the matter, he said what he had called you there to say. It was to the effect that he had three children. The eldest, myself, was well situated, and needed no attention, but the two younger ones were at school, somewhere, and needed both care and money. He asked you, at least, to see that they did not suffer. How did you keep the promise you then made?"

"You never went near the young children, but a recently-taken picture of myself which I had sent my father so took your fancy that you sought me out. I suppose you liked the original, for you told the lie which lured me away from my home; away to the West, where I became your wife. Why did you marry me? I will tell you."

"Years before you had married a woman of your own years, and, though she tired of and left you, she still lived, as you were aware. Had she been dead you would never have spoken of marriage to me, but you supposed she lived. Unluckily for you, she really died one day before our marriage, and I therefore became your lawful wife."

The elder twisted uneasily in his chair, and looked at his wife as though it would be a pleasure to kill her for having been the innocent means of baffling his trick, but her revolver was still well advanced and he merely muttered:

"Well, well! Go on!"

"There is little more to tell. One thing must be mentioned, however. I have reason to be-

lieve that in the rage which followed your discovery that you were legally married to me you would have killed me had it not been for one thing; you had received news that a piece of waste land long owned by my father had been found rich with a deposit of coal, and I thereby became an heiress."

"What did you do about it? First, you defrauded my younger sister and my brother out of their shares, and, keeping me ignorant, took to your own self all the money received for the land. How you did all this I do not know, but I suppose it was by skillful forgery."

"I am done, Asa Lockdale, Mormon. I have shown you one chapter in your life of villainy, and I will not pause here to tell how you made my life with you a burden and a curse; how you tortured me, body and soul, until last night you tried to end it all by murdering me."

"Until then I was weak, submissive and cowardly, but when I knew you at last as you were, I changed from a weak creature to an avenging woman, and I tell you, Asa Lockdale, Mormon, I will make the remainder of your life as miserable as you have made mine."

"Allow me to ask," said the elder, with dry sarcasm, "how you learned all these family secrets?—how and when?"

Victoria smiled with calm consciousness of power.

"That is my secret, and one I do not believe you will readily penetrate. Enough that, after long years, I know you as you are—in a measure. I dare say your crimes are as numerous as the stars of heaven."

"Thanks, my charming Blanche!"

"Asa Lockdale, do not resume your old, sneering manner until you are sure you have regained your power. Just now, I would sooner expect to see you fall dead with some avenger's bullet in your body."

"Who would do me harm, if not you?" the elder asked, a strange look on his face.

"Who, indeed?"

"Perhaps you can tell."

"How should I know? Perhaps I might surmise that a man who had lured a dozen women into miserable marriages might have many enemies, but it is not my place to study the matter out."

"What matter?" Asa curtly asked.

"The matter of your foes."

"What do you know of them?"

"I have told you once—nothing!"

The elder was looking at her with a pantherish light in his eyes. He was thinking of the mysterious slayer his followers called Heavy Hand, and it had occurred to him that wife Number One might know more about it than she had confessed. The death of Rudolph, a victim of Heavy Hand, had been almost simultaneous with the escape of Number One, and it seemed to mean something.

He arose and looked at her feverishly.

"Woman," he said, "you are a dangerous person, and I'll see that you are put where you'll do no more harm."

The words had barely passed his lips when there was a sound at the door; a rap which showed that one of the Danites was there; and the elder's face brightened.

"Help!" he cried. "Danites to the rescue; help, help!"

Edna's head reeled, and she caught at the lattice door to keep herself from falling. The discovery she had feared now seemed inevitable, and all her courage seemed gone.

But Victoria did not show corresponding weakness. For one moment doubt and fear were visible on her face, and then she stepped to the door and turned the key with a quick motion, pulling the door open.

As she did so a human form appeared. It came not erect, but toppled in and fell to the floor, and Asa Lockdale saw a dead Danite lying across the threshold. The man who had knocked a moment before was now still in death.

And the elder reeled back with a husky cry:

"Heavy Hand!" he cried, hoarsely.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE DANITES IN THE GARDEN.

WALLACE BROOKE'S house was dark and silent; if appearances were correct, no one was astir there; the whole household seemed wrapped in slumber.

Appearances, as is often the case, were not a true criterion, for not one of the little party slept. Instead, they kept watch and ward, and prepared to meet the danger, of which Abijah Miffin had given warning, as best they could.

Roger Hobart did not intend to be kidnapped. He knew very well that if he fell into the hands of the elder, his chances of ever becoming an octogenarian were few and unpromising, and he was likewise aware that his counsel and strong arm were needed by his friends.

Percy Brooke was as uneasy as any one there; he constantly feared that some turn of the tide would betray the share he had taken in getting the family into this danger, and he looked with suspicious eyes upon Abijah, and wished that he would accidentally shoot himself, or in some other way get off the scene of action.

The man from Peach Trees was the most at ease of any of the party. Perhaps the influence of his old home was upon him, and had a lulling effect, but his mind was on the present and decidedly active. He increased Percy's antipathy toward him by talking more than seemed necessary with Lillian Allen.

"It seems tew me ef I had as pritty eyes as some folks I'd go tew bed an' keep 'em so," he significantly observed.

"Still, I shall remain up," the girl calmly replied. "You can't get rid of me so easy as that."

"Yewr loss is ovr gain," he answered, "an' I must say I ain't had so agreeable comp'ny sence I sot up with Mirandy Ann, at Peach Trees. She was the pootiest gal you ever *did* see; by gosh! yew'd orter seen her eyes, mouth an' ginerel make-up. She looked jest like yew."

"Mr. Miffin, you are very foolish," Lillian observed; but Percy saw, with fierce jealousy, that she was not in the least inclined to be angry.

"It don't stand tew reason a man kin keep his wits all straight in yewr presence," the Yankee declared.

Percy Brooke ground his teeth and felt like putting a bullet through Miffin. How dared he talk as he was doing to Lillian? How dared she listen to him so kindly?—she, who had always turned coldly away when he, Percy Brooke, tried to talk a lover's language!

"I've killed one man to win her, and if this idiot of a Yankee dares to make love to her, he shall go the same way!" the young man muttered, and it was lucky for him that the darkness concealed the furious expression on his face. "But she would not be such a fool. He is rough, coarse, ignorant; what girl would marry him? She merely listens because he amuses her; I need not fear Mr. Abijah Miffin. Yet, they still go on with their silly speeches. Curse it! my fine cousin had better be careful, or I will make her sorry for it!"

And Percy ground his heel into the carpet viciously. Somehow, this night he felt more depraved than remorseful, and remembering that he had sold his soul to the Danites, he felt just like going on the downward road.

What did it matter? Who would care if he went to ruin? Of what use was he to any one?

"If I have a chance, I'll deliver Hobart into the hands of the enemy!" he thought, with sudden recklessness.

His ardor cooled suddenly when the latter arose and announced his intention of making a circuit of the house, and as he moved off, Percy did not follow.

Abijah let Roger out by the rear door, and then the latter moved on slowly and carefully. There was no knowing at what hour the Sons of Dan would strike—if, indeed, they came at all—but he had had a feeling that he ought not to be sitting tamely inside; that he ought to be up and stirring. The cloud which hung darkly and heavily over the merchant's house, was in itself mysterious, and it would not be odd if something more than chance had sent him out.

Had he known all the influences that were at work, and had an inkling of Percy Brooke's intended treachery, he might have thought it more to his good to keep inside and watch that young rascal.

Having no suspicion of the truth, he went on steadily.

Once clear of the house, he crouched for awhile in the shadow and listened and watched. No unusual sound was borne to his ears; no unusual object met his gaze. There was, however, room enough for more than one hostile form near the building; the ornamental trees and shrubbery Mr. Brooke had carefully cultivated in the past now became a nuisance.

After a short time devoted to this careful investigation, Roger moved on to make it a more active one.

He first took a turn along the street, but this was free from pedestrians and, seemingly, all other people. Then he moved into the garden.

Was it possible this beautiful place, with its flowers and green bushes, could hide a blood-thirsty foe? Quite possible, Hobart thought, and he looked without any favor at the dark shadows formed by the same green bushes. There was just the cover for the Danites, if they were lurking near, and he loosened his knife and held his revolver firmly clasped as he went on among them.

It was not a pleasant work, for he had reason to believe the Sons of Dan ardently wished to kill him, and they would surely never find a better chance than from the shadow of the bushes.

Possibly they would hesitate to fire an alarming shot, and if they made an attack he intended to do his share toward making it interesting.

Half the distance had been gone when a suspicious sound reached his ears. He paused and listened. It was that of two men talking.

His lips parted with a grim smile; his suspicions seemed about to be verified; and then he crept forward with all possible caution and skill.

Chance was in his favor, and, as no betray-

ing sound proceeded from his movements, he soon arrived where the dim murmur assumed form and clearness, and he again paused, this time to catch their words.

"We must use patience," said a subdued voice. "It is true time is rolling on, but we had better let it go than to do anything rash and thereby spoil the whole plan. Our ally will open the door as soon as such a thing is safe."

"Unless he is suspected."

"No danger of that."

"Are you sure? That Hobart is said to be a keen fellow, and danger sharpens men's wits."

"Pshaw! men are as easily bagged as blind mice. I never yet saw one too sharp to be humbugged. Are the Sons of Dan to be beaten by these beggarly Gentiles? Well, I think *not*."

"Take care that you do not underestimate them."

"What is Wallace Brooke?"

"A man, my friend. Come, let us not analyze them in detail. They are a party of imperiled persons, and if they don't summon up some sharpness it'll be odd."

"You forget our man inside the house."

"I forget nothing, but it seems to me he is confounded dilatory, or else that he has forgotten his promise."

"We want to be admitted before daylight."

Hobart set his teeth tightly. He had heard every word of this conversation, and it had been enough to show him that treachery was afoot. Naturally, when they spoke of their ally inside the house, his thoughts turned to Abijah Miffin; that it could be any other person did not once occur to him; and he longed to get his hands on the man from Peach Trees and reward him for his intended treachery.

The crime seemed dark enough to the listener; he remembered Lillian Allen, and thought that it would be a fiend who would betray her into the hands of the remorseless Danites.

Woe be to Miffin when he felt the weight of his avenging hand—and yet, was Miffin a traitor?

Time would prove, and time, perhaps, would show Percy Brooke as he was.

Roger became impatient to confront the supposed traitor, and he turned away with more speed than caution. It was an unlucky movement. A dead twig cracked under his foot, and the sound galvanized the Danites into new life. Roger did not at first know whether to flee or rely on luck to help him out, but his hesitation soon ended.

There was a crashing of bushes, and then the two men shot forward with marvelous rapidity. One glance showed Hobart that he must work well or lose the game, and, instead of running in a direct line, he stooped and shot under the arm of one of the men.

As he did so the fellow aimed a blow at him, but it fell short.

Roger's courage did not waver, and the Danite's chances of capturing him without alarm were not good, but luck deserted him when he needed fortune's favors the most. His foot caught among the bushes, and he went down with such suddenness that one of the pursuers fell over him.

Both men had drawn their knives, and they now prepared to use them, if necessary, but Roger Hobart lay without motion and they hesitated.

"What's the meaning of this?" one asked.

"Perhaps he's fainted."

"Nonsense! More likely he has struck his head against this tree, and knocked out what little wit he had. Who can he be?"

"Some prowling fool; possibly a man out on a lark and returning late. What shall we do with him?"

They consulted for some time, but were helped to a decision by the fact that Barwolf had posted them to keep off intruders. Little suspecting that their prisoner was one of the occupants of the merchant's house, they decided to take him away before he recovered consciousness, and to effectually prevent the possibility of his return.

"Dead men tell no tales!" one of the pair observed, "so let us call Meron and hustle him away at once."

This plan they proceeded to put in execution at once, and with their best man gone, the chances of the "Gentiles" became even more desperate.

CHAPTER XIX.

ABIJAH USHERS IN NEW GUESTS.

PERCY BROOKE experienced a feeling of relief after the departure of Roger, and he would gladly have seen Abijah Miffin go the same way. Under their gaze it seemed to him his secret hovered on the border-land of discovery, but his own family were so much attached to him that they would overlook the plainest evidence if it was against him.

The time was coming, however, when he would have to place his reputation and his future in serious jeopardy. He had promised Harrod that he would admit the Danites, and though the spy's expressed motive was to seize Hobart, and the latter had gone out, Percy was not released from his promise and he dared not break it.

But what would be the result of keeping it?

Percy shivered at the thought. Weak and vicious though he was, he had not lost all affection for his father and sister, and for Lillian Allen he had a passion which need not be further described than by reminding the reader that it was for her he had betrayed Locke Kellogg.

He now feared by admitting Harrod he should betray his villainy, and the thought was one which nearly drove him wild.

He cursed the hour when he first associated with the Sons of Dan; he cursed the even-spoken, fanatical Harrod; and, standing on the bridge of glass he had built, he looked in vain for a chance to escape.

He was finding that the way of the transgressor was hard, indeed.

He watched the clock as the hands moved on and neared the hour at which Harrod had said he would be ready to enter. The long minute-hand seemed to gallop; did ever seconds fly so fast before?

Percy grew nervous, replied somewhat incoherently to his father, and grew fearful of Miffin's eyes. Did the man from Peach Trees suspect anyway? If not, what meant his sharp glances?

The poor fool and villain writhed on the sword with which he had impaled himself.

It soon became evident that Hobart would not return before the hour set for Harrod. The former had been absent longer than seemed necessary, but fears for his safety were not yet aroused.

Wallace Brooke, the chief of the party, had confidence in his sagacity and judgment.

Percy arose and sauntered from the room. He tried to give the impression that his mind was at ease, but he felt that all looked at him with suspicion. No doubt, he thought, they whispered about him when he was once out of the room. He had bid adieu forever to mental peace when he sold his soul to Harrod.

When beyond the sight of the family he made haste to the window where the Danites had directed him to come. All was still as death around the house, and, looking out, he hesitated for a moment and hoped Harrod had failed to keep the appointment.

But the hope soon vanished.

"He is not the man for that. One might as well expect the Evil One to forget that he had a claim on an unfortunate wretch. He is sure to be here, and I—Heaven help me!—I must keep my part of the compact."

Moving forward again, this time abruptly, he raised the window and looked out, following the act by a peculiar motion of his arms.

If he had still a hope, it vanished as a lithe figure emerged from the shrubbery and came forward with a light tread. It was easily recognized; it was Harrod.

"Good!" said the spy, in a low voice. "You have kept your compact, I see! It is well, and the Sons of Dan will not forget. You can return to your friends."

"But—" began Percy, who wished to state that Hobart was outside the house and keep Harrod out; but the authoritative, though quiet, voice interrupted him:

"This is no time for words. Go away!"

"But—"

"Enough! Did you not hear me?"

There was a terrible glare in the spy's eyes, which even the darkness could not hide, and the coward fell back precipitately. He knew well enough that Harrod ought to know that Roger was not inside, and that it was to the advantage of both the Danites and himself that the fact was known, but when Harrod became angry he sent cold chills down Percy's back, and he did not care to stop and argue the matter.

Accordingly, he retreated to the room where he had left his father, Lillian and Abijah Miffin.

"Did yew see any on the scribes an' Phara-sees?" asked the man from Peach Trees.

It was a simple question, but as Percy found all eyes turned upon him, he grew hot and weak. Conscious guilt magnified these glances into those of accusation, and he felt for a moment like making a bolt for the door. Second thought, however, convinced him there was nothing in his fears, and he managed to answer carelessly, and then find a retired seat.

But he could not compose himself. The time was a most important one; it was fraught with the most important events of his life. By that time, no doubt, the Danites were inside the house. He listened for their footsteps, or other evidence of their proximity, but all remained quiet.

Where were they, and what were they doing? Where was Roger Hobart? Would he be found by them? What was Harrod's plan? Would the rest of the family be attacked?

These and other questions passed through his mind, and, coupled with his constant listening for signs from outside, made him so nervous he could hardly sit still.

How would it all end? Great heavens! was he about to be unmasked to that father who was the soul of honor? Was his crooked career to be made known to all?

He looked at Lillian with burning eyes. She

had never looked fairer. Her beauty turned his head; his brain seemed on fire. She spoke, and the music of her voice was a fresh spur to his maddened fancy.

"I'll possess her though ten thousand fiends and Danites stand in my way!" he thought, his teeth tightly set and his gaze ever on her. "I'll steal her and flee from all who know us—Danites or otherwise. I'll win her or kill her!"

It was a terrible threat, but he meant it all, and Lillian Allen would have shuddered had she known the tempest that was in his ill-directed mind.

"It's sorter queer Roger don't come back."

It was the placid voice of the man from Peach Trees, but Percy started as though it had been that of an enemy.

"It does seem time for him to return," said Wallace Brooke, arousing from painful thought.

"He has been gone a long while," added Lillian.

"He isn't the man to ruin all by undue haste," said Percy, trying to seem at his ease.

"Wal, I guess it won't dew any hurt fur me tew look around an' see 'f I kin find him," Abijah decided. "Jest yew stay here, an' I'll come back putty soon."

He arose and moved toward the door as he spoke, and no one offered opposition, though Percy was not pleased. The latter partially arose, as though to accompany him, and then resumed his seat.

"This is a dismal watch," sighed Lillian.

"You should go to bed, child," Mr. Brooke replied.

"I cannot sleep. Like the rest of you, I yielded for a while to weariness, this afternoon, and slept a little, but, remembering Edna's unknown fate, I could not close my eyes now."

"Poor Edna!"

Mr. Brooke's voice trembled, and Percy, remembering how much he had had to do with bringing trouble upon the family, felt miserable. The mood was not new to his weak and vacillating nature, and all the viciousness returned when he looked again at Lillian.

Something worse was in store for him, and his hair almost rose on end as the door opened and three men appeared. The first two were bearded strangers; the third was Abijah Mifflin, who was escorting them in at the revolver's muzzle.

"Critters!" said the man from Peach Trees, "sot down. Find cheers fur yewrselves an' plant yewr budies in 'em. Don't stand on no ceremony about c'urtchysayin', nur nowthin' o' that sort, fur we don't expect much style. Only sot yew daown, an' don't be a-starin' 'round like a humsick cat lookin' fur a crack tew dodge out on. Set yew daown!"

The Yankee's voice was as cheerful as though he was a teacher of etiquette, and had favorite pupils under his eye, but that did not help Wallace Brooke from taking the alarm.

To him the strangers looked sinister and desperate, and he clearly perceived that nothing but Abijah's revolver kept them where they were.

"What is the matter?" he cried, starting up.

"The fat's in the fire, and the cow's jumped over the moon," serenely replied Mifflin.

"We demand your protection, sir," one of the men hastily said, addressing Brooke.

"From what—from whom?" confusedly demanded the merchant.

"From this desperate ruffian, who—"

"Hal hal!" broke in Abijah, "desperate ruffian's good. I hev no idee but I look it; I r'a'ly b'lieve I dew. Alderman Brooke, Esquire, kin you diskiver by ther feeble light o' ther kerosene glim, a ferocious and anthropophagistic expression on my face? Kin you see blood in my eye an' dirt on my left sleeve—but-ton! Dew yew perceive that I am a combination o' King Philip, an' Jack Cade, an' severial other men o' dark deeds?"

"For Heaven's sake, give me a chance to speak. I ask you, who are these men?"

"They're the 'rastrocracy o' Paradise Gulch come tew see yew. They're the salt o' o'w natyve land, an' the best pillar o' bang-up s'ciety. We don't hev no sech at Peach Trees—fur which, praise be tew Moses!"

"You infernal idiot!" complimentatively said one of the strangers, "will you give us a chance here?"

CHAPTER XX.

MR. MIFFLIN ENTERTAINS THE DANITES.

"SARTIN! Put in yewr dollar, an' yew hev a fair chance tew draw a gloss-diamond pin—only tew thousand other com-pe-ti-tors. Naow, blow yewr bazoo!"

Abijah spoke with his usual cheerfulness, but he was in earnest, and the men thus accorded a chance proceeded to tell their story, such as it was.

They said they were "Gentiles," and newcomers in Paradise Gulch; that they had had trouble with some of the Mormons and had been arrested; that they had escaped and had taken refuge in his (Brooke's) house because they thought it deserted.

Their manner was earnest as they spoke, but, if they had otherwise possessed the eloquence to

convince the merchant, Abijah spoiled it all. While they talked he winked and grimaced to such a degree that his face was drawn into most hideous shapes, all of which went to convey his lack of belief in what they said.

Yet, Wallace Brooke, feeling that they could not afford to lose any real friends in such a crisis, hesitated about answering decisively until he had Mifflin's outspoken opinion.

The Yankee began to loom up as a tower of strength.

"Yewr yarn won't hold water, nur 'twon't work," said Abijah, coolly. "It bears ther imprint o' falsehood an' knavery on ther face on't. Yewr must be blind in one eye an' deaf in t'other tew take this fur an unpopulated haouse. Ther hull yarn is gauzy an' brittle. Admiral Brooke, sir, I diskivered these tew Pnarasees clombin' threw ther winder. It was a 'spicious way tew enter, an' I laid by at one side an' waited tew make ther acquaintance. I did it, tew; I did it, by gosh! When I found them wal in, I jest p'inted ther shootin'-iron at them."

"Surrender, or die!" sez I.

"Never!" sez they.

"Dew it, or chaw'r lead," sez I.

"Give us a show," sez they.

"You'll find Barnum's next door," sez I.

"We'll go an' look fur it," sez they.

"No, yew won't," sez I. "Tain't off'n we hev guests that dew ther winder racket, an' we can't part with yew naow we hev yew; we can't, by gosh!"

"An' then I clicked my Smith & Wesbeston, an' tole em' tew circumnavigate tew this room, an' ther shooter had sech a persuasive voice that they obeyed, an' hyar they be. Naow, critters, raise yewr bazoo!"

The "critters" did not seem at all reluctant to talk, and they opened on Brooke in an attempt to convince him that the account they had given was a truthful one; that they were really men persecuted by the Mormons, and that they were ready to be good and true friends to him.

The merchant did not know how to proceed. There was little to recommend them in the way in which they entered the house, but, as before said, he was reluctant to throw away any possible chance to secure real friends, and he gave their absurd claim more latitude than he would otherwise have done.

What decision was he to make?

He looked inquiringly at Percy, but that young man avoided his gaze.

He looked at Abijah, but the Yankee seemed as careless and indifferent as though nothing was at stake.

"I guess thar's room fur a couple more," he said, genially. "I've told you severial times, gents, tew set daown, an' I must say yew hurt my feelin's by not dewin' so. Dew yew s'pose cheers is tew look at, or tew occupy?"

"If we are to be granted your friendship, we shall be pleased to sit down," was the ready reply. "We feared you were disposed to regard us unfavorably."

"Not a tall," Abijah asserted. "We pretend tew hev some gift o' character readin', an' we kin see yewrs is above the average. Yew'r welcome tew a seat in our forum o' justice."

Every one looked doubtful and bewildered. True, the Yankee had not been loud in his opposition, at any time, but he had made opposition, and no one understood what had caused his change of base.

The discomfited Danites muttered a few ill-chosen words and kept the seats as he directed. They had fallen into his hands more through chance than by any oversight of theirs, but the screws pressed down none the less tightly.

He had used remarkably good judgment throughout the whole affair. Seeing them enter the window he had first waited to secure it, so that no one else could follow, and then overtook and captured them.

His success in doing this was greater than he had dared expect, but he had a way about him that was suggestive of flying lead, and they had yielded to his warm invitation to enter the room.

"Dew yew think o' locatin' at Paradise Gulch?" he genially continued, as he followed their example and sat down.

"We ain't decided."

"Yew'll like here. Business is brisk, s'ciety good—e'ena'most ekul tew Peach Trees—an' the graveyard a beautiful spot tew lay down an' idle away an afternoon in eternity."

"Don't talk of death," said one of the men, scowling.

"Why not? 'Tain't my way tew try tew keep off a guest that will come in when he sees fit. Death ain't tew be bluffed, naow yew kin squander gold coin."

"The subject ain't cheerful; change it. Sir," to Wallace Brooke, "I hope we are welcome here."

"All Gentiles are," the merchant cautiously replied.

"Bless yew, yes," broke in Abijah. "Keep yewr seat an' hev no scroopies; it's all right."

Nothing could exceed the outward show of good will and nonchalance which he made, but it did not prove contagious. Both Lillian and the merchant were nervous and uncer-

tain. They felt sure the new-comers were enemies, but Abijah's peculiar stand put them at fault. Perils seemed to multiply, and they knew not which way to turn.

The Danites, too, were ill at ease. Their mission was not succeeding as they had hoped. They had come to secure Roger Hobart, but they saw nothing of him, and the remarkable man from Peach Trees had practically made them prisoners. How were they to turn the scale? He said he had closed the window by which they entered, so none of their companions could join them unless the Danite leaders saw fit to break in, which the two men knew they did not want to do.

They looked appealingly at Percy, but that young man shivered and turned away. He felt as though each minute was a year added to his age.

"I—I think I'll go and look around a little," he said, nervously, as he arose.

"Better set daown," said Mr. Mifflin. "Yew an' me will keep this room, an' yewr dad can dew sentry duty till our pard comes back."

It was a simple piece of advice, on the surface, but Percy felt that there was hidden menace; he caught a glance from the New Englander which seemed keener than usual, and he resumed his seat with an unpleasant feeling that Abijah, at least, knew of, or suspected, his treachery.

"Something must surely have happened to Roger," said the merchant, in an aside, to the Yankee.

"I fear it; I r'a'ly dew," said Mifflin, more earnestly than usual. "I tuk him tew be a man capable o' lookin' owt fur hisself, or I should 'a' protested ag'in' so resky a trip, an' it naow seems he hev run chuck intew some pesky fix."

"Great Heavens! if this is so, it is the traditional feather on the camel's back," Brooke almost groaned.

"That don't foller. Brace up and be of good cheer."

"How can I, situated as I am? I hope I am not wholly a coward, but I am a man and a father. Remember that my daughter, whom I love more dearly than my own life—"

"Rightfully, I make no doubt," Abijah interpolated.

"Is gone—stolen—perhaps in the hands of the horrible Danites. Over the rest of us hangs a cloud which is thick and heavy, and death seems likely to be our lot. Such being the case, I confess I am weak and miserable."

"Your son don't seem over and above chipper," Mr. Mifflin added, glancing at Percy.

Wallace Brooke sighed.

"He seems to lack nerve."

"But his heart is in the right place, ain't it?"

"Certainly," said Wallace, quickly. "Percy is not exactly of a positive nature; he is far less so than Edna, even; but he is all else that a father could desire."

Abijah secretly grimaced in a way which indicated a lack of faith in the younger Brooke, but he made no comments.

"S'pose you go on a tower of observation," he said, instead. "I don't disguise from you the fact that these tew int'restin' chaps are Danites, an' the fact that they're inside, an' that Roger is so long gone, is derned funny an' suspicious. I think it would be puffedly fit an' proper fur you tew make the tower, while I stay here an' keep a weather-eye open fur the Philistines."

Mr. Brooke went, while the captured Danites, who had watched this whispered conversation with suspicion, looked at Abijah as though they would be pleased to cut his throat. Yet, they were not fools. Experienced in wild life and the temper of men, they read the fact that whether Mifflin hailed from Peach Trees, or Borrioboola Gha, or elsewhere, he was a man of nerve and one with whom it was not safe to meddle.

It would be the work of but a moment to raise from his lap the revolver he held there, ostensibly to guard against the known danger, and, before they could do any harm—even if they were sure Barwolf would approve of extreme measures—Abijah could pick them both off if he was a good marksman.

His keen eyes did not overlook their furtive glances, and with the utmost nonchalance he drew a knife and began to ostentatiously sharpen it on his boot-leg.

The Danites felt that to attack him would be some like engaging a battery of heavy guns.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE CLIMB OF ALEXIS.

BARWOLF believed that, aided by Harrod, he had arranged his plan for capturing Roger Hobart in such a way that it would succeed, but luck had been against him. In the first place, Roger had left the house unseen—a very singular fact, since the Sons of Dan were watching closely all the while. Probably he had secured the one chance in a hundred.

Next, Hobart had been captured by two of the band who, believing him an outsider, had used their own judgment, and taken him away unknown to Barwolf.

Again, when Percy opened the window for Harrod he would have explained to the spy that Roger had gone out, but Harrod cut his

speech short in such a way that the young man was frightened out of saying anything further.

Then, after the two men entered, a long period of inactivity followed which mystified and troubled the chief of the Danites. The room occupied by the "Gentile" family was so situated that when lighted the fact could be easily concealed. Thus there was no sign of life about the place, and when his followers entered they seemed to be swallowed up by the silence and darkness as completely as is a dead man when he is carried to his quarters in a graveyard.

Barwolf waited and watched, but his patience was not rewarded. His men did not return. He passed through the grades of impatience, anger and anxiety, but that did not help the matter; the men came not.

He looked at the dark and silent house. What secrets did it hold? Where were his men? He remembered that the window had been closed after they went in, and from this he argued the worst.

"That Hobart, who is said to be a demon, may have killed them!" he muttered.

Harrod had left the vicinity after helping in his men. Barwolf regretted that he was deprived of his aid and advice. He felt the need of both then. How was he to manage the scheme? It would be short work to break in a door or window, but Asa Lockdale had given imperative orders that the work should be quietly done, and he dared not infringe on his directions.

Yet, he did not like the stigma of failure. He turned to one of his men.

"Alexis?"

"Yes, chief."

"Can you enter the house?"

Alexis meditated for some time before answering.

"That depends on how much latitude you give me," he finally said. "I can force a door, or break a window."

"Neither must be done."

Barwolf spoke decisively, and his man, who could not understand the fine policy and diplomacy which actuated Lockdale and Barwolf, gave a sniff of disapproval.

"Hope you don't expect a man to fly down the chimney," he finally said.

"That will do; the Sons of Dan have no time for useless levity. I ask you, can you enter the house, secretly?"

"I don't think I can, chief."

"Perhaps ten dollars will urge you on."

Alexis looked more closely. He prided himself a good deal on his ability as a climber, and his gaze was on a window which nestled on the roof just under the shadow of the chimney. It struck him that there, if anywhere, was the place to enter secretly. But could it be reached? The majority of men would have said no, but Alexis was also looking at the lightning-rod and considering the possibilities.

"I'll try it!" he suddenly said.

"You have a plan?"

"Yes."

"What is it?"

Alexis briefly described it.

"I'm afraid it can't be done."

"To try is only to fail, at the worst."

"But the Brookes will bear your scrambling against the house, and that will spoil all."

"Trust me for that. I am of light weight, and you shall see that I can go up like a cat."

Barwolf did not give his permission at once, but Alexis had entered into the spirit of the scheme with zeal, and it was only a matter of time. The chief was anxious to have it done, and as no other way seemed open, he gave way in due time.

Alexis prepared for the attempt. There was little to do in the way of preparations, except to remove his boots, and then he started out and up.

He soon proved that his boast had not been wholly unfounded. If he did not move like a cat, he certainly did ascend with unexpected silence, and he had a faculty of balancing his small person so that the lightning-rod did not get half the strain Barwolf had supposed it would.

Onward and upward Alexis progressed, without anything to indicate that he was seen, until the eaves were reached and he drew himself upon the roof. After that his way was easier; he clung to the rod with one hand and went up the slope quickly, but cautiously.

When he reached the window he found it secured on the inside, as he had expected, but this was an obstacle which did not delay him a great while.

He drew his knife and commenced chipping at the putty with such zeal that he soon had a square of glass loose. He removed it, thrust in his hand, unhooked the fastening, and the way was clear.

He entered, not hastily, rashly or noisily, but with the caution which had all along marked his movements.

He was in the stronghold of the imperiled Gentiles; the next thing was to find them, without being found himself.

It was no easy matter to descend to the lower part of the house unheard, but he took time for

it and went on. He used all possible caution and, at last, gained a view of the door of the room which was lighted, yet which gave no light to those outside.

The next thing was to see the interior.

Once more luck was with him. All the legitimate occupants of the house had assembled there again and, guarding their prisoners, were discussing the mystery of the disappearance of Roger Hobart, and the singular course of the Danites who, being able to enter at any time, did not push matters and enter by force, if necessary.

All this Alexis heard; all these persons he saw. He looked at troubled Lilian; shrinking, nervous Percy; thoughtful Wallace Brooke; buoyant, self-possessed Abijah, and the two captured Danites, who still scowled blackly, but, held by Mifflin's arsenal of weapons, kept up the force of being honest men and dared not make a hostile movement.

Alexis saw and drew his conclusions, one of which was that the man from Peach Trees was the most dangerous of the little party. His slow, nasal enunciation did not hide the fact that an active nature lurked behind all, and the intruder could read his temper as well as he did that of Percy Brooke.

Percy, poor fool! was worse than a woman. He cowered and shrunk within himself, and had an absurd fancy, still, that the ghost of Locke Kellogg, whom he had betrayed, was still hovering around.

Alexis believed that emergencies often required prompt action, and, seeing his brothers there, held by Mifflin's revolvers, and realizing the fact that Abijah was the ruling spirit of the Gentiles, he debated whether it would be wise to send a shot through him as he sat there, and thus enable the captive Danites to spring up like jacks from a box.

Had Alexis been able to submit this question to Barwolf, or Asa Lockdale, his answer would have been prompt. It was not their policy to proceed to any such extremities—not until Edna was found, and she and Lilian were in the hands of the elder.

After that, the lives of their male friends were like so much chaff.

But Alexis had a policy of his own, and he resolved to act upon it at once. He withdrew a little, and then secretly pulled back the hammer of his revolver. The click was deadened; no sound went out to warn the little party of "Gentiles," and the would-be assassin crept back to the door to do his work.

His chance was a good one, except that he had no light upon the barrel of his revolver. He must aim in the dark. That was bad, but he felt equal to the demands of the occasion. He covered the person of the Yankee and took aim.

Abijah Mifflin was near his end that minute; perhaps there had never before been a time when the shadow of death hung so darkly over him.

A moment more would have settled the matter one way or another, but just as Alexis was about to press the trigger, he felt a peculiar sensation, as though an icy hand was laid upon his throat; a touch which seemed to chill his blood throughout his veins.

He started abruptly, trying to wheel, but a strong arm wrapped itself about him and the movement was foiled.

A terrible fear fell upon the Danite, for he had a suspicion, even then, but the cry he tried to sound died away on his lips. Then followed a thud as of a blow, and then—silence.

The minutes ticked on until ten more had passed. Then Abijah Mifflin arose.

"I reckon I'll take a scout this time. Yew, Wallace Brooke, keep yewr eyes open!"

He winked as he spoke, and Brooke did not fail to comprehend that his ally referred to the captive Danites.

Abijah passed the threshold of the door, but there he paused. No wonder. Just beyond lay the body of a man; a man who did not belong to the garrison; and one glance was enough to make the Yankee recoil.

That form which lay there motionless was that of a man forever done with life. Dead! Yes, and, as Abijah looked, he glanced around with a start undeniably nervous and muttered: "Heavy Hand has been here!"

CHAPTER XXII.

HEAVY HAND'S VICTIM.

FURTHER examination seemed to corroborate Abijah's opinion. The dead man had been stabbed just as Heavy Hand stabbed his victims, and mature deliberation left little doubt of his cause of departure from earth's field of action.

The Sons of Dan had lost another member. Alexis would never more go, or come, at the bidding of the great chief, Barwolf; the cold hand was on his neck, and his blood, and his heart, never to be removed.

Heavy Hand had been there. So much the defenders decided, but it gave them little clew to the facts of the case. On the contrary, it threw them into a deeper perplexity. To say

that the unseen destroyer had been there was to give little information.

Who and what was he? Who was the creature that came and went in all places as though they were alike; who seemed to disregard bolts and bars, and to consult only his own will; who was so terrible a foe?

Terrible he surely was, yet Abijah Mifflin voiced the opinion of all when he said:

"I can't feel that we need tew shake or shiver. Who ever knew him tew strike anybody but Danites? I guess while he keeps at it in *that* way we can stand the pressure, by gosh!"

He spoke with an emphasis which found a degree of echo with the others, but they could not feel easy while that lifeless clod lay there and the mystery was unexplained. The merchant decided to throw off the thin veil of secrecy, and, taking the light, he made a search of the house.

He found where Alexis had entered, and repaired the damage done as far as was possible, but there was no sign of Heavy Hand.

The unseen destroyer seemed to have departed as strangely and secretly as he had come.

In the meanwhile, Barwolf had impatiently awaited the result of his follower's attempt, and when he saw the moving light he was not long in deciding that Alexis had come to grief.

He resolved to take the responsibility of decisive measures, and with his men at his back, he advanced to the front door and rapped loudly.

The summons had been twice repeated when a second-story window was raised and a calm voice broke in upon his clattering.

"Hellor, daown there! What in mischief be yew tryin' tew dew? Wanter smash the door all tew pieces?"

"Where is Wallace Brooke?" demanded Barwolf, disguising his voice somewhat.

"Gone on a pleasure trip tew Brigham City."

"I don't believe it," the Danite reported.

"He was here at dusk, and he must be here now. I want to speak with him. Tell him so."

"The telegraph machine is outer order, an' I can git no word tew Brigham City. Go away, an' come ag'in some other day."

"I am coming in now," said Barwolf, in an ugly tone, and losing all sense of prudence. "Open the door, or I will break it in!"

"Yew jest try it, an' yew'll find yew hev saddled the wu'st kind o' a boss yew ever rid in yewr life," said Abijah, belligerently. "We don't put up doors tew hev them smashed in by no galoots on a spree, an' ef yew git rambunctious yew may expect tew see hot times."

"Open the door or I'll break it in!"

"Try it, an' I'll shewt the hull darned passel o' yew! Naow, yew bear that in mind. I ain't jokin' a bit, an' I mean jest what I say. Go away an' let us alone. That's ther safe way. Ef yew come foolin' arownd, it means death tew yew, sure!"

There was a ring in Mifflin's voice which showed that he meant all he said, but Barwolf would not heed it then. Circumstances had caused him to lose his head. Three of his men had gone into that house and then become strangely silent. He believed they had been killed, each and all, and the way in which the Sons of Dan were being cut off was enough to sting any ambitious leader to the quick.

"The ax!" he exclaimed. "Beat in the door!"

A crash followed.

"Stand back, you consarned critters! Last time o' callin'—stand back!"

It was Abijah's warning voice, but he spoke to men who would not hear and heed.

The assault on the door was resumed.

Then the Yankee began his work.

The night was too dark for elaborate aiming, but he had a general idea of the direction, and with both hands reached over the window casing, he pulled the trigger with all possible speed and regularity, and the leaden hail went tearing down.

It was returned. Of course it could not be otherwise, and Abijah heard bullets pattering around his head, but the shower soon ceased and Wallace Brooke's voice sounded beside him.

"They are all gone!"

It was true. Whether the firing had been too hot for them, or whether there was another reason, the "Gentiles" had no means of knowing, but certain it was that Barwolf and his men had abruptly departed.

"Yas, he's gone, an' we've naow got a chance fur action we may never have ag'in," said the man from Peach Trees.

Barwolf led his followers straight back to Asa Lockdale's house. He wanted official advice on the case in hand. Was he to make the battle one of bloodshed, or give it up for the time? That was what the elder must decide.

Having escorted his surviving men to the guard-room, the chief then sought Asa. He knocked at the latter's private door, but there was no reply. Through the transom of stained glass he saw the light still burning, showing that the elder had not retired for the night, and he pushed the door open without further ceremony.

He glanced about for Lockdale, but did not at first perceive him. When he did he started back in surprise.

Lockdale lay at full length on the floor, still and silent, his pale face turned up toward the ceiling, and looking more like that of a dead man than aught else.

Barwolf started forward with a faint cry and knelt beside him. One touch of his hand was enough to prove his first suspicion incorrect; the elder still lived, but he was for the time the same to the world as a dead man. Barwolf raised his head and loosened his collar, and the symptoms were such that he had no fear of his dying, just then.

He started off to get some water, but had gone only a few steps when the elder gave utterance to a sound which was a cross between a snort and a cough, and then added:

"Hold on! Fiends seize you, where are they?"

Barwolf saluted with military precision.

"Where are who, sir?" he respectfully asked.

Lockdale opened his lips and then closed them again. He was confused and excited; that was clear; and with his hand at his head seemed to try to catch some wavering idea, or to map out some plan for the future.

He dropped into a chair with a groan.

"Great heavens! what a night. Barwolf, bring me the strongest whisky you can find—no, make it water. I am burning up, and something must be done."

The chief brought the water, wondering a good deal. He saw that the elder glanced nervously about him, as though expecting to see an enemy start out from some crack or corner, and he again spoke respectfully.

"You have had visitors, I think, my master."

"Curse you! why do you think that?" cried Lockdale, with a spasm of anger. "Who should be here at this hour?"

"That I don't know, sir, but I judged some one had, from what you said, and I thought perhaps you would wish to tell me if you had seen anything unusual."

"Anything unusual? May the fiends seize you, what should I see here? What could come to my private room, that I would keep out? Your insolence is too much for my patience; I have seen nothing!"

Looking at his faithful follower as suspiciously as though he were a plotting enemy, and with his eyes turning restlessly in a white, frightened face, Asa Lockdale shot forth these words spitefully enough for the truth.

Yet, they were false. He had seen something, as we already know, and his terror was the result of his legal wife's visit.

We left Lockdale and wife Number One, alias Victoria, alias Blanche, just as the opening of the door allowed a Danite to fall forward and lay still and dead on the floor.

A little, red pool gathered by his side, and as Asa saw the narrow cut through his outer garments he uttered the cry before recorded.

"Heavy Hand!"

He had no proof that the work was that of the secret destroyer, but Heavy Hand had come to exert a strange influence over him. Granting that all the mysterious deaths in the Danite ranks were traceable to one and the same person, Heavy Hand was truly a creature to be feared. He came and went mysteriously, struck his blows on the lonely street or in Lockdale's own house, and no man could say whether he was old or young, black, red or white—it was even uncertain whether the slayer was a man or a woman.

Such being the case, the elder was under the influence of vague terror, and when he saw his dead follower he leaped to a conclusion and exclaimed:

"Heavy Hand!"

Wife Number One hastily closed and locked the door, and then again confronted him.

"Yes," she said, in a deep voice, "this is the work of the Unseen Destroyer, of Heavy Hand, the mystic, the viewless. You have called for your man, and he is here!"

She pointed to the lifeless clay and a perceptible sneer curled her lips.

"Woman!—demon!" the elder cried, "you had a hand in this work!"

"In the killing of your tool?"

"Yes."

"Nonsense!"

"I say you did. You or an ally killed this man. You have killed others before. Where are Rudolph, Ruric, Yusef, Hassan and others? Dead, and all by the act of Heavy Hand. Rudolph died the night of your flight, woman, and at your door. Dare you say you do not know how he died?"

"I did not see him die; I did not know he was in danger of death until I saw him lying lifeless."

"But you know who struck him down."

"I do not."

"Woman, you lie!"

The elder, aroused for the time from his fears, spoke in the old, harsh voice so familiar to unfortunate wife Number One, and as he spoke he started forward to seize her arm, and shake

her soundly, as he had done many times in the past.

But the old times were over, and Victoria coolly receded and put out her revolver.

"Stand back, Asa Lockdale, Mormon. Touch me, and I will serve you as badly as your tool has been served!"

"Curse you! I will be the death of you!" Asa snarled.

"You have tried hard during the years that are gone, but your chances for success are not so brilliant as they were. I was once a slave, but I am now your ruler; your life is at my mercy!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE GRASP OF AN UNSEEN HAND.

LOCKDALE cowered like the craven he was. With all his Danites and stout Barwolf to execute his purpose he could plan and act boldly, but, individually, he was a straw on the swift current.

The revolver showed him that Death had his icy hand at his throat, while the tense, stern manner of his wronged wife was a new and terrible revelation, after all the years she had crouched and cowered at his whims.

"In mercy's name, do nothing rash!" he pleaded.

She laughed bitterly.

"Rash? It would be a blessing to the world if I was to speed your miserable life forever."

"But I am your husband."

"Heaven help me, you are! Yes, you are my legal husband, as well as the so-called one of several other helpless women whom you stole, and whose hearts you are breaking."

"It is the custom of my church, and they came of their own free will," he pleaded.

Again she laughed bitterly.

"Your church! You belong to none. Cast off by the real Mormons of Utah, you are a poisonous serpent resting on a branch of the tree of Mormonism. As for your wives, besides myself, I will not assume to speak, but I will convince you I am conversant with your methods. Stand where you are!"

She stepped back a little, and then tore open the closet door so suddenly that Edna, who was hiding and barely venturing to breathe, had no chance to try to hold it together.

She stood revealed to the elder's gaze.

"Look!" cried Victoria. "Here is one who, if not a wife, you aspire to make one. Lo! she cometh willingly, does she not?"

The woman's laugh rung out sneeringly, wildly, but Asa Lockdale took no notice of its inflection. He was looking at Edna in the most dumfounded amazement.

The lost girl was found, but he would as soon have expected to see an angel as to meet her, willingly, in his house. How and why had she come! Could it be she had really decided to become one of his numerous helpmeets, or—

But, no; the idea was a wild one; she was in the company of Blanche, and, consequently, must be his enemy, even as Blanche was. She stood by the door, pale, trembling and shrinking, but he would not be surprised if she suddenly produced a revolver and became as much of an avenger as Victoria.

His matrimonial affairs were getting in a decidedly complicated way.

"So!" said Victoria, with a wildly-sarcastic voice. "What do you think of it? Here is wife Number Ten, or such a matter. Greet her lovingly. Express to her the affection which moves your heart; give your idea of Love's young dream!"

Her mocking voice would have angered a calmer man, but Lockdale scarcely heard it. He was looking at Edna with blank perplexity expressed on his face. The lost was found, but how strangely found! He would as soon have expected to see the Queen of England in his house. Edna's troubled face and perceptible shrinking showed that she was not there as an accuser.

"What do you propose to do now?" the elder asked, turning an angry and threatening face toward Victoria.

"To make you surrender."

"You are mistaken if you think you can do it."

"Wrong, Asa Lockdale, Mormon, wrong!"

"Remember I am in my own house!"

"Remember I hold you at this revolver's muzzle."

"Beware!" said the elder, explosively. "You know me of old, and know that I am not a man to let any one ride over my head. I will rule or ruin. You know my temper—beware!"

"Yes, I know your temper well, Asa Lockdale, Mormon, and I know the barbarity and cruelty of your nature. Knowing this, I know how to deal with you. Don't imagine that I will abate one jot or tittle of my advantage. It is in your power to shout aloud, but I swear that that call seals your doom. You have goaded me to madness, and now you are reaping what you have sown."

"Beware!"

The elder spoke in a husky whisper, and one hand worked convulsively about his throat as though his breath did not pass easily.

"Of you?" scoffed Victoria.

"Ay, of me."

"You are no longer dangerous; you are a child at whom I laugh."

He reeled back and rested one hand weakly on the back of his chair. Was this the wife who had cowed before him so many years—who had begged for mercy, for kindness, even for civility? What magic had been at work that in an hour, as it were, she was transformed into a relentless avenger?

"Let us speak of Edna Brooke," Victoria continued, when she saw he did not speak at once. "I understand that you wish her for a wife."

"That is my business," he growled.

"In my opinion, she has a word to say about the matter. Child, Asa Lockdale, Mormon, has expressed a desire to make you his wife—Number Thirty—or is it Thirteen?—and he would like an answer now. What is it?"

Edna had rallied in a degree, and it occurred to her that the wisest thing she could do was to use some diplomacy.

For the moment, Victoria held the world and Lockdale at the rise and fall of her revolver, but they were in the elder's house and there was no knowing how soon the advantage would be reversed.

"This is not the time or place for either proposal or answer," she said, with dignity.

The elder brightened perceptibly.

"Miss Brooke," he said, eagerly, "I beg that you will not form an opinion of me from what this madwoman may have said. She is deranged and fancies I have abused her, whereas I have always been tender and kind—"

Victoria broke forth with a mocking laugh.

"Heaven save the mark, Asa Lockdale, Mormon. But what does it signify?"

"Miss Brooke," the elder eagerly continued, "I beg that you will separate yourself from this wrong adviser, and return at once to your father. He is worried about you, for your singular disappearance passes easy explanation, and he will welcome you gladly."

"What Miss Brooke desires is to leave Paradise Gulch. Are you willing to furnish horses and send her at once?"

Victoria spoke abruptly, but the elder seemed proof against all emotion.

"That is a matter which I will settle with her and her father, when she has returned to his house and—"

"Bah! why do we linger? We might as well talk with a fiend let loose from Inferno. Would Asa Lockdale, Mormon, promise anything worthy, or, promising, would he keep his word? I know him too well to think it, and we will not speak of it. Asa Lockdale!"

Her manner and voice changed, and she spoke gravely, earnestly, solemnly.

"Well?" he questioned, feeling the change, despite his callous exterior.

"Are you prepared to die?"

"To die!"

He started and looked fearfully at the revolver.

"Nonsense! I have no intention of taking your life. I do not need to do so. Death, itself, is what you have to fear, not its common instruments, and Death is now hovering over you. Do you hear his resonant footsteps?"

"What rubbish is this?"

Asa spoke sharply, but he shivered for all of that. The voice of his wronged wife was deep, solemn and effective, and it seemed to him to be weird and sepulchral. Later, he might laugh at his folly, but, just then, it moved him deeply, and his blood felt chilly in his veins.

"I speak plainly and simply of a remarkable fact. I say you are near your death, and I speak of what I know."

The elder glanced behind him, but no one was in sight. He turned to Victoria, trying to summon a grain of courage.

"In what form is death coming?" he asked, with a smile which was the shadow of a sneer.

"Do you really want to know?"

Was it fancy, or did the room grow dark as she spoke? The elder faintly answered:

"Yes."

"Know, then, that Heavy Hand is here!"

The words fell with startling force, though quietly spoken, upon Asa's ears, but just as he started back, the case assumed a worse form. Something like an icy hand was laid upon his neck, while another voice whispered in his ears:

"Heavy Hand is here!"

What followed the elder never really knew, but he was conscious that the room grew still darker; that there was a heavy pressure on his neck; that all the colors of the rainbow seemed to flash before him—and then he lost consciousness.

When he recovered Barwolf was bending over him, as has been told, and Victoria and Edna were nowhere to be found. They were searched for thoroughly, for the elder soon decided to make a clean breast of it to his chief Danite, but the most vigorous measures failed to trap them.

Where had they gone? How had they entered the house? How had they left it? These and many other inquiries were in Lockdale's mind, but, though he raged and offered rewards, they were not found.

And so the night wore away. Asa slept but

little, for, though surrounded by his chosen followers, he could not forget Heavy Hand—the unseen destroyer who seemed able to come and go at his will—and he dreaded a second experience with those terrible fingers.

It was not until day dawned that he grew calm enough to pay attention to Barwolf's report concerning the Brooke family. Then he sent him with orders to arrest the whole lot, but at the end of half an hour the chief returned.

"Sir," he repeated, "Brooke's house is deserted and silent. The family have gone, one and all, and left no sign!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

AMONG THE DANITES.

ROGER HOBART had fallen into dangerous hands when he was kidnapped near Brooke's house, as before described. It will be remembered that the men who captured him were pickets posted by Barwolf to keep away intruders, and that when Roger came to their net they did not for a moment suspect he was one of the household.

Consequently, they did not consider it necessary to report to Barwolf, but, believing they had secured one of the "outsiders" for whom they were watching, they hurried him away.

"Vladimir, he must never return," said one of the trio.

"Not to-night, certainly, Marco."

"I said, never return."

"Why so? We have no authority to take his life."

"Think again. We found him prowling around where our men were concealed—ay, *prowling*, which shows he had suspicions. Is such a man to go free and tell his tales to all the world? No! At such a rate Paradise Gulch would soon fall into ill-favor and be known as the plague-spot of Utah. It must not be, for we hope to raise up a people which shall eclipse Brigham Young's church, and even the ruling one of the whole United States. We of Paradise Gulch are unlike any other people who have trod the wide lands between the Pacific and the Mississippi, and we must become great and noted, to show people that the worshipers of Heat and Light are something more than dreamers."

Vladimir and Perez echoed his words with fanatical fervor, and then he added:

"Let us then take this infidel to the secret house and give him to the sword-pit. Those who fall there never tell any tales."

"Right, brother."

Little more was said, for it was not easy to carry the stout prisoner in his state of unconsciousness, but they soon arrived at the building into which we saw Locke Kellogg taken when he was betrayed. Into this he was taken without delay.

Lights were procured, and Marco uncovered the well. The place was as we saw it last. The swords protruded from the sides of the pit, sharp and keen; but they had a dulness just then, as though something had obscured their brightness not long before.

All of these men had seen Kellogg sent to his fate, but they felt no remorse as they looked at the swords.

"Shall we work at once, or wait till he recovers his senses?" asked Marco, glancing at Roger.

"I have an idea," said Vladimir.

"What is it?"

"We do not know who this man is. Can we justly go ahead and put this man out of the world without a word? Perhaps we should be making a serious mistake. Would it not be well to send for Harrod and let him decide?"

The question was a timely one, and after it had been duly considered, was decided as Vladimir had suggested. Perez went in search of the Danite spy, while his comrades remained to watch and await his return.

The minutes wore on, but to Hobart, at least, they brought a change. His senses slowly returned, and his eyes opened abruptly at the end.

Marco was looking directly at him, and in a moment he was by his side.

"Be still!" he said, producing a knife and flashing it before the prisoner's eyes. "Do not attempt to escape."

The warning seemed unnecessary, for Roger's hands were bound behind his back, but it served to concentrate his ideas. He remembered the adventure in Brooke's garden—his encounter with the unknown men, and his collision with a tree when he attempted flight.

He therefore looked at the man with the steady gaze which, in its strength, was peculiarly a part of his nature.

"To escape?" he repeated. "Am I, then, a prisoner! Of whom, and for what purpose?"

"You are inquisitive."

"Naturally, being interested."

"Well, there is no reason why we should deny you the knowledge you seek. You are in the hands of the Sons of Dan, the Destroying Angels."

"What do they want of me?"

"You are dangerous."

"Is it possible that you, a brawny fellow, are afraid of me?"

"I? No!" Marco sturdily declared.

"Who is, then?"

"Bah! no one is afraid, but you are in the way of Elder Lockdale, and—"

The Danite stopped suddenly, and looked at though he could cheerfully have bitten off his tongue could he thus have recalled his thoughtless words.

Hobart smiled triumphantly, for he had taken pains to work his captor up to just that point.

"Speak out, man. Say that I am in the elder's way because he has designs on Wallace Brooke's family, and he fears my head and arms when they are pitted against him."

"Have it so," growled Marco. "You will never live to make use of the knowledge."

"Perhaps not, but that is what only time can tell. So far as I am personally concerned, I am inclined to think I shall make use of it. I am a hard man to keep down, Danite."

"Dead men tell no tales."

"True, but who knows which of us will die first? You have the upper hand now, but it may be Heavy Hand is near, waiting until the proper moment to strike you down."

Marco shivered, and looked nervously about him, but he saw nothing which looked like the unseen destroyer.

"Nonsense!" he replied. "Heavy Hand is the creation of diseased minds. There is no such creature. True, men have died in Paradise Gulch, here and there, mysteriously, but it is absurd to think all died by the same hand, or, if so they died, that he is anything more than human."

He tried to speak bravely, but Roger saw the troubled look on his face, the inflection of his voice and his shiver.

"You will change your mind when Heavy Hand has you in his grasp," he warningly said, anxious to play on the man's fears.

"Bah! there is no Heavy Hand!"

"Liar!"

The voice rung out on the air with an incisive and startling force, and the Danites leaped to their feet as one man, consternation expressed on their faces. In truth, Hobart would have followed their example, for the voice had an uncanny inflection, which for a while affected even his practical and sensible nature, but his bonds kept him down.

Before more could be said, however, Perez and Harrod strode forward. Their faces showed the same fear seen in the others, and they glanced uneasily about.

"Who spoke?" Harrod demanded.

"The Prophet knows; not I!" Marco replied.

"Fool!" said Roger, resolved to make the most of his impression, "why will you close your eyes and ears to what the blind can see and the deaf hear? It was Heavy Hand who spoke!"

No one answered at once, but Harrod stood looking darkly at the prisoner, his fingers working nervously about the front of his black coat and his parted lips revealing carnivorous teeth.

"Say no more," he finally said. "Beware how you array yourself on the side of the secret foe of the Danites. Accursed be all who dare do it. The Sons of Dan are the chosen of the Prophet; the worshipers of Fire and Light; the purified and the blest; the future rulers of all the broad land of Utah."

"All the land they will have will be a pit six feet by three, and they'll own little of that. The veriest beggar, the thief and the assassin will have as much."

Harrod came closer and laid his hand on Roger's arm.

"Use caution with your words," he said, somberly. "You are not so situated that you can defy or scoff at the Sons of Dan. You are marked by them, and your end is near."

"You are one of the chiefs of the infamous league, I suppose," Roger coolly said.

"The league is not infamous, nor am I a chief. I am simply a follower of the just Prophet, Elder Lockdale, and a humble worshiper of Heat and Light."

Harrod bent low, and, with his eyes cast down and his slender hands crossed over his breast, looked as much a heathen and bigot as any man of the Dark Ages.

Roger's lips curled scornfully.

"I have heard this mummerly before," he said. "Asa Lockdale, your bright luminary of the Mormon sky, is full of it."

The spy looked fixedly at the speaker for awhile, and then motioned his fellow Danites to retire. Left alone with Hobart, he bent his somber eyes upon him and looked as though he was a dark and saturnine priest come to condole with a dying man in a dark and reproachful way.

"Roger Hobart," he deeply said, "do you know this is your last night on earth?"

"No," boldly answered Hobart. "I know nothing of the sort."

"Still, it is true."

"Time will prove."

"Whom the Danites mark are irrevocably doomed."

"Better turn your attention to Heavy Hand."

"My attention is on you, but I have a few

words to say before you start on your long journey to the Gentile hereafter."

"Well?"

"Once you had a sister."

Hobart started. Harrod had enchained his interest at the very start, and from that time he gave close attention.

"What do you know of her?" he tersely asked.

"I know that though she was your sister, her name was never Hobart."

"What, then, was it?"

"Blanche Bird!"

Hobart was aroused from his usual calm dignity. His face had lighted with new emotion, with eagerness, and his breath came less regularly than usual.

"In Heaven's name, what do you know of Blanche Bird?" he quickly demanded.

Harrod smiled coldly.

"I know that which, when you have heard all, will wring your heart to the core; will wring it as I would have the hearts of all your accursed race wrung. I know the history of her life as Elder Lockdale's wife!"

CHAPTER XXV.

A SOMBER GUIDE.

HARROD'S words came forth with a slow, malignant force, as though he would brand each one on the heart of the prisoner, and Roger writhed as though under a heavy blow.

"Great Heavens!" he gasped, "my worst fears are realized."

The Danite smiled coldly.

"Said I not I had you on the hip?"

"Lockdale's wife?"

"Ay."

"Perhaps his legal wife?"

"One of many."

"I feared it, but would not believe it true. Poor Blanche! Poor Blanche!"

The stricken man closed his eyes for a moment, giving way to agony of mind which seemed to rend both brain and body. When he opened them he saw Harrod still looking at him, his dark face somber and almost set, but his teeth parted in the shadow of an exultant smile. So might a dark, gloomy, silent demon look when gloating over the misfortunes of others.

"You are a devil!" Roger involuntarily exclaimed.

"I thank you," Harrod replied, with a deep bow.

"Dog! you dare not release my hands and give me a chance to avenge your sneers."

"Why should I? Do men usually abate jot or tittle of an advantage they gain over a foe? No! You are my prisoner, my victim, if you will, and I choose to tear your heart before I give you over to merciful death."

"Well, go on with what you have to say. You claim to know something of Blanche Bird. Tell me what. Where is she?"

"Dead!"

"Dead?"

"Ay!"

Hobart had echoed the word in a tone of the deepest horror, but the Danite was like ice except that his dark eyes, seeking the prisoner's face, seemed to read him and exult in his misery.

"When did this happen?"

"Not long ago—a week, a month; more, perhaps, or it may be less. I take no heed of time in such matters. The elder has many wives; beautiful women who go to help make up the Mormon Prophet's dream of Heaven. Perchance the women are not happy; I cannot say. The greater part of them look pale and woe-begone, but a woman's heart, at the best, is made of tears, and sighs and complaints. Blanche Bird was a fair sample, yet there was that about her—an air of dignity, I will call it—which made me notice her more than the others."

Roger was looking at him eagerly, hanging on every word.

"Go on!" he said, tersely.

"She had a habit of going about the house like a female Macbeth—with downcast head, melancholy face and frequent sighs. She was a picture of grief. Naturally, she faded. She grew thin day by day, and when she sighed there was less resistance. Perhaps she faded to nothing; I know not. 'Tis enough that she died."

Nothing could be more unfeeling than this speech, and Marco and his friends looked at each other and nodded approbation of his peculiar wit. They did not know who Blanche Bird had been; it was commonly supposed that only Lockdale knew the names of his wives; but they approved of Harrod's course.

He was their idol: the personification of a Danite worshiper of Fire and Light.

Hobart was silent for awhile, his gaze fixed stonily on the wall beyond the flickering light, and when he spoke his voice was so lowly pitched that only Harrod could distinguish his words.

"She was my sister," he said, gloomily, "but she alone of our family bore the family name after our parents died. Asa Lockdale was left our guardian, but he basely abused his trust. I, a mere boy, being away at school, was

abandoned, and, when money no longer came for my expenses, narrowly missed being thrown on the town where I was, as a pauper. Luckily, a man named Hobart became interested in my behalf. He took me to my old home, and found that Asa Lockdale had sold off the meager family property and, taking my sister, Blanche, had gone—no one knew where.

"There ended my life as Roger Bird. Mr. Hobart adopted me and I took his name, and thus I grew to manhood. The memory of Blanche became dim, in one sense of the word, but I remembered the general opinion that Lockdale meant her no good, and when I became a man I—"

He paused abruptly, as though there was danger of his saying too much, but Harrod finished his sentence:

"Sought for Elder Lockdale."

"I did, and I found him just after he was expelled from the genuine Mormon church by Brigham Young. But I found no trace of Blanche, and Lockdale said she had left him five years before, marrying a Mississippi pilot. I had to believe him, but you—you said she lived until recently?"

"Ay."

"Are you sure?"

"I can show you her grave."

"Will you do this?"

Roger asked the question eagerly, half-starting from the floor.

"Not so loud; we must keep secret what we are saying. My comrades are in accord with me, but the thing I last mentioned is not a part of our duty as Sons of Dan. Quite the contrary. And I think if Elder Lockdale knew of it he would not be pleased."

"Harrod, do you speak in good faith?"

"Ay."

"And you will show me where Blanche Bird lies buried?"

"Ay."

"Do it, then, and all I can do for you shall be done."

"Do you suppose I want or would accept, your help or sympathy? Do you suppose the Sons of Dan would look kindly on one of the accursed people? No; we curse them with our first and last breath; we war on them when living and, as ghosts, haunt them when dead. Say no more; we are eternal enemies."

At the last somber word the spy arose.

"I will take the prisoner to the elder," he said, addressing the other Danites.

"Shall we return to Barwolf?"

"No. Remain here, and I will see you before morning. Leave the matter all to me and I will attend to it."

As he spoke Harrod cut the bonds which bound the prisoner's feet and motioned him to rise. The other Danites did not seem reluctant to exchange outside service for a few quiet hours in the old house, and they moved into an inner room.

Roger and the spy were left alone, and as the former looked at the latter's slender frame he thought that if a chance occurred he would soon show him who was the better man.

A cold smile flitted across Harrod's face.

"You think you see in this expedition a chance to escape. Disabuse yourself of that mistake. You are going to see the grave of Blanche Bird, and nothing more. No chance will be given you to pit your strength against mine, but I will say that, even though you had the chance, it would do you no good. Look!"

As the spy spoke he suddenly held up before Roger's eyes a keen and glittering knife, flashing before the light of a lamp in every possible way.

"With this in my hand I do not fear huge men, or numbers of men. I defy even Heavy Hand and death. Come!"

Thus tersely finishing his speech, Harrod took Roger's arm and led him toward the front door. The prisoner felt new hope, despite the warning given him, and resolved not to let any chance escape, though he would first test the spy's knowledge of Blanche Bird's last resting-place. After that—he tried his bonds, but they had a firmness not calculated to arouse confidence.

They passed out on the street. The night had become superlatively dark, and Roger could not at first see an inch before him. Dark clouds obscured the sky, and even the air seemed thick and heavy. The silence of the street, however, told that no one was abroad in that immediate vicinity.

"Keep close to me," said Harrod. "An attempt to escape would be useless."

"Have no fear," Hobart tartly said. "I have agreed upon this mission and I am going."

He was in earnest. He believed this was the only chance he would ever have of seeing the grave of his sister. He sighed as he thought of her. True, he had been but a child when he last saw her, and the memory of her face had died from his recollection, but the same blood had flowed in their veins and her unhappy lot touched him deeply.

It also turned his mind still more bitterly against Asa Lockdale. The vague suspicions he had held were confirmed, and it became the

ruling passion of his life to escape and seek justice—and vengeance.

Though Asa Lockdale were ten thousand times the ruler of Paradise Gulch, he would have satisfaction.

Paradise Gulch! What a mockery was the name: the place seemed a mausoleum of human hopes and hearts. All was bitterness and trouble there except for the favored followers of Lockdale's revised Mormonism. Where was Edna? What would be the fate of the Brooke family?

With his mind busied by such questions, Roger took little heed of their course. Indeed, it was wholly useless to try to understand it; the darkness prevented that; so he trusted himself to Harrod's guidance, and went on silently.

The Danite seemed to comprehend his mood and was correspondingly taciturn himself, and neither aroused until they arrived at a dark building.

"Do you know where we are?" Harrod asked.

"No."

"I suppose not; but you shall soon see. Here is a door; enter!"

A click had accompanied his words, and Roger saw a dark space open before them. At the spy's direction he passed within, finding a floor of stone under his feet, and Harrod followed and closed the door.

They were in a place where the air was damp, close and thick, and Roger could well believe they were in a tomb.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE BOY, SCARPOLE.

THE Danite led on in silence, Roger following close behind him. At times the latter had half-defined thoughts of assaulting him, despite the fact that his hands were tied, and making feet do the duty of fists, but the interest he had expressed in Blanche Bird's grave was not a mere pretense or caprice. He had meant all he said.

He followed Harrod with this purpose always in view.

As has before been said, the air of the place they were now treading was damp and close, and he knew if they were near an ordinary building it was in the cellar. His feet still pressed a stone paving, and once he touched his elbow against a wall that seemed to be of the same kind.

"Here is another door."

Harrod spoke carelessly, and Roger followed him through a narrow opening, evidently to some sort of a room.

The prisoner went a few steps and then paused in doubt. He had noticed, as a singular fact, that the spy's footsteps and movements were no longer audible, and a sudden suspicion of foul play came upon him.

He wheeled, but as he did so, there was a dull clang which he was not at a loss to understand. He sprang forward, but it was only to collide with a solid surface; and, flung back by the shock, he was forced to a disagreeable conclusion.

The door had been fastened upon him.

"Harrod!" he cried.

There was no answer.

"Harrod!"

He called again, though no longer with a hope of getting a reply. His voice sounded dull and hollow, and a faint echo came back, but that was the only answer.

"Tricked!"

He muttered the word between his set teeth, and then, with rough haste, began to explore his quarters. He was not surprised at the result. On each side he met a wall of stone, or adobe, or whatever it was, with no break. Beyond a doubt, he was in a dungeon to which Harrod had lured him by a cunning artifice, rather than take the other Danites from more important duties.

For awhile he was angry with the spy, and in a mood for doing him harm if he could get his hands upon him; then followed indifference and doubt regarding all Harrod had said.

But, no; it could not be all a dream. The somber spy had mentioned Blanche Bird, and he must have known of her—ay, he must be well informed, for there were few in all the world who knew that Roger Hobart had been born Roger Bird, or had once had a sister whose name was Blanche.

The prisoner found a stool and sat down upon it. Where was he? Why had Harrod thought necessary to leave him so abruptly and singularly? What would be the end of the adventure, and would he ever learn more concerning Blanche Bird?

Captivity had no power to daunt his determined nature, and he once more made an effort to burst his bonds. It was in vain; they had been put on to stay, and they stayed. Clearly, he must remain a prisoner so far as his own means of relief were concerned.

Half an hour passed, and then there was a sudden change in the scene. There was a rattling as of a key in a lock, a click, and then, as Roger started up, the door receded and a light appeared; a feeble lamp.

As first Roger's eyes were dazzled, even by

that, but they soon cleared, and he saw a person behind the lamp. But not Harrod. No; a very different person was visible; a person who seemed likely to be a man if he lived long enough, but who was then nothing more than a boy.

Probably he had seen eighteen years of life, but his form, though tall, was as delicate as that of a woman, and the wrist which held the lamp was a puny one, and the smooth, boyish face was almost haggard, though his expression was by no means weak or irresolute.

He held the lamp above his head, and the two looked in silence for awhile. The visitor was the first to speak.

"Your name is Roger Hobart?" he questioned.

"Yes."

"Then you are the man I seek."

"What do you want of me?"

Roger asked the question with real curiosity, for neither the voice nor manner of the visitor was indicative of hostility.

"What do you most desire?"

"Liberty," was the ready response.

"And Edna?"

Roger started.

"Edna? What do you know of her?"

"I know where she is."

"Is she well—and safe?" Hobart asked, with evident emotion.

"Both."

"Thank Heaven for that!"

The boy watched him curiously.

"You do not act as though anxious to see her."

"Give me a chance," was the quick reply.

"You must not expect to talk to a bound prisoner and find him like a man who is free. I do not know you, nor how you chance to be here, but you have the air of one who comes and goes at will. If such be the case, you must be aware that we are where men's natural feelings change; where poison mixes with the air which one breathes; where crime rides rampant over heads and hearts—in brief, this is the city of Asa Lockdale."

"I know something about the matter myself," said the boy, though his stolid tone was not in keeping with Hobart's intense one. "I don't blame you for not liking Lockdale or his ways."

"Perhaps you feel like me?" quickly returned Roger.

"Plainly, I do."

"Boy, who are you?"

"My name is Scarpole."

"Scarpole?"

"Yes."

"A queer name."

"Rather."

"Perhaps, however, you have a human heart in your breast, rather than a tiger's, such as many men here have. You look kind and honest, and I throw myself on your mercy. Will you release me?"

"To do that I must incur the enmity of Lockdale."

"And win my eternal gratitude—and that of Edna, since it seems you know of her."

"Ay, that I do, and it was because I knew she loved you that I came here. More, I come to rescue you. I delayed for awhile, for I wanted to read you; to see if you were worthy of her; but I am now satisfied. Hold out your hands and I will—there, you are free!"

He had used a knife with good effect; the bonds fell away and Hobart was once more at liberty except for the place he was in. He stretched his arms and drew himself up to his full height. Next, he extended one hand to his rescuer.

"Boy, I thank you most cordially—"

He paused somewhat suddenly as Scarpole sprang away from the extended hand and then laughed uneasily.

"Pardon me, sir, but I never touch any man's hand in friendship; it is my whim. Shall we go—to Edna?"

The boy's manner had changed to curtness, but the last two words were uttered more gently, and Roger, quickly forgetting his rebuff, eagerly bade him follow. Scarpole thrust a knife into his hand, but said he had no revolver, and they passed from the dungeon.

Scarpole plainly showed that he was at home in the place, and he led on with quick, unhesitating steps. Along a rocky passage they went for several yards, turning here and there, until Scarpole finally paused before another door.

"She is there!" he said, pointing inside.

"Lead the way at once, then; lead on!" said Roger, eagerly.

The boy pushed the door open and went in lightly. Roger followed. He had not been deceived. They were in a plainly furnished but well-lighted room, and at the further side was Edna Brooke. She was looking toward the door with an eager expression on her face, and, at sight of Hobart, she quickly arose, joy overspreading her pretty features. A moment more and the lovers were clasped in each other's arms.

Scarpole started, and then went to the further side of the room and began to pace to and fro quickly. His gaze was on the ground, but he thrice brushed his hand across his eyes as

though deeply affected. A queer boy he seemed, since boys of his seeming age are rarely moved by love affairs in which they have no part.

Edna and Hobart had much to say, but they scarcely said it coherently. There was much—so much—to tell, and minutes were precious then. Both realized that. But Edna managed to say she had been kidnapped in a way she could not understand, and then she told of Victoria and their visit to Elder Lockdale.

When they left there Victoria had led her away at once, taking advantage of the elder's terror when he was attacked by some one who claimed to be Heavy Hand. Who it really was Edna did not know. The light had been turned so nearly out that she saw nothing of the throttling, and she gave it as her opinion that Victoria had had an ally near who claimed to be Heavy Hand to frighten the Mormon elder, but the wronged wife did not enter into details. She led Edna quickly and safely away by the same way they had used when entering.

Whether Victoria was in her right mind remained to be yet settled, but if she was mad there was method in it. She planned and executed well. Having conducted Edna to her former quarters, she stated that it was her desire to restore her to her friends, and that she would send to her a boy, named Scarpole, who was fully competent to be her guide.

She departed and Scarpole came. He at once proceeded to business and, stating that he could bring Hobart to the girl, had kept his word thus far with praiseworthy fidelity.

And Roger and Edna were once more united, though still in a place to them unknown and mysterious. What new dangers awaited them they did not know, but they felt braver than before. If fate was kind enough to leave them together they could fight the future with more firmness than ever before.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE FLIGHT FROM PARADISE GULCH.

WELL aware that the night was rapidly nearing an end, Roger did not protract the conversation longer than was necessary before calling to Scarpole.

"I understand that you volunteer to guide us away from Paradise Gulch," he said.

"You are right," the boy tersely replied.

"What means have you for going?"

"Horses."

"Where are they?"

"At present with Wallace Brooke."

"Ha!—do you mean—"

"That they, too, are prepared for flight? Yes. I have been to them and told them the hour was come to leave the Mormon town, and as my friend, Abijah Miffin, convinced them I was to be trusted, they were not slow to desert a house which bade fair to be a tomb if they remained there. A dark cloud is over Paradise Gulch—perhaps I should say a red cloud, cast like a shadow by Elder Lockdale's red hand—and it is time all honest people should flee. Most of all should the Brooke family go. Asa Lockdale aspires to marry Edna, while John Hughson, his prime minister, is just as anxious to wed Lillian Allen, whether she is willing or not. Yes, it behooves all who would avoid the plague which percolates through all this city!"

Hobart looked keenly at the boy. He spoke in a fervid, high-pressure style, and Roger noticed things which aroused a train of thought; it was a wonderful boy who expressed himself in such a style. Once, Roger opened his lips to express a part of his thoughts, but he closed them again, resolved not to be hasty.

From that time he regarded Scarpole in a new light, watched him closely, weighed his words and actions, and, curiously or otherwise, seldom thought of him except in the same breath with Heavy Hand, the unseen destroyer.

"No one is disposed to dispute your views," he finally replied, "and I am delighted to hear that the way of escape is open. Lead on as soon as you will."

"Follow, then!"

"But—but, what of Victoria?" asked Edna. "Shall I not see her again? Is she to remain here? Is she proof against the plague?"

"She is her own mistress," Scarpole answered, somewhat curtly, "and, I suppose she thinks, able to care for herself. At any rate, she intends to try it. Let us leave her; it would not be the strangest thing in the world if she should join us on the trail. Come!"

They did not demur, but, arm in arm, followed their strange guide. Hobart was still without a weapon except the knife, but Scarpole had said he could give none and there was no other means of supplying himself. He was poorly situated to defend the girl he loved.

Their journey underground was a short one. Scarpole soon opened the door, through which the fresh air rushed in, and, a moment later, they stood under the open sky.

Edna looked up and uttered a little cry, but the guide stopped her suddenly and imperiously. No wonder the girl had started, however; they were under the walls of Elder Lockdale's house, and, looking up, she saw a light from the elder's window.

"Let us go!" she said, feverishly.

They went, gliding carefully, but rapidly,

along the dark and silent streets. Each moment Hobart expected to see one or more Danites start up beside them, but they went on undisturbed. Edna noticed that their course was not toward her father's house, and the further side of the village was soon reached.

Scarpole did not hesitate, and as they went on they soon neared a group of trees standing at one side of the town. He uttered a whistle which was echoed from the grove, and then a man came forth to meet them.

"By gosh! it's them," said a voice Hobart did not fail to recognize. "Yew kin all throw up yewr han'kerchers with joy, fur the lost is found. Here comes the gal, by mighty!"

It was Abijah Miffin who spoke. During the last half-hour Hobart had been too busy to recollect that he had decided the man from Peach Trees to be a traitor and spy, but the recollection now came to him with startling force. The presence of such a man would probably prove fatal to them in their flight, and Roger's hand involuntarily dropped upon his knife.

He was not of a hasty disposition, however, and on second thought he resolved to go slow and watch the Yankee closely. He had no desire to wrong an innocent man, and, if Miffin was really what he thought, he would prefer to catch him in some traitorous act, and then make his punishment decisive.

The reunion was a joyful, though subdued one. Wallace Brooke, Percy, Miffin and Lillian were there, horses were in waiting, and all nearly ready for flight. And none too soon, for day was near at hand.

Although all were anxious to go, there was some delay about starting, and at this juncture Roger noticed that Scarpole was missing. Something like suspicion assailed the young man, and he turned hurriedly to his companions.

"Let us lose no more time," he said, quickly. "Mount, and let us get on the trail."

This was enough, and they swung into their saddles as quickly as possible; but Roger, looking all about him, failed to see Scarpole. Just then, however, occurred something which startled every one. From the further side of the grove, which was not large, arose a sound as though a human cry was cut short at its birth, ending in a gasping wail which was not loud but decidedly thrilling.

A cold terror fell over all, but a moment later Scarpole glided into view, coming through the bushes, and without a word sprung to his saddle.

"Away!" he said, tersely.

So saying, he turned his horse's head and rode from the grove, and one after another the others followed. Oddly enough, none of them spoke about the stifled cry—all felt sure it was something Scarpole might explain, but did not care to; and thus they rode away.

Scarpole had the lead, closely followed by Wallace Brooke and Lillian, Roger and Edna, and Abijah and Percy brought up the rear.

The latter was the most nervous person there. He felt that in deserting Paradise Gulch he was bringing upon himself the ban of the Sons of Dan, and there was no knowing to what a length they might go. So he frequently wiped his damp forehead and rode on, feeling like a man attending his own funeral, but more miserably situated.

Probably all the little party were anxious from some cause or other. They were entering upon a journey which they knew would bristle with dangers. When first considered it had been pronounced a hopeless one by all, but sheer desperation had driven them to undertake it.

Many miles must be gone before another village was reached; the Danites would soon be on their trail, and they were reputed to be rare riders and the owners of unusually fleet horses; and along the trail there was no real chance to hide, so far as was generally known.

Roger Hobart looked at the Eastern sky. It was taking on a silvery color there, in contrast to the general darkness elsewhere, and he knew day was not far away. What would it bring to them? He was weighted down by the gravest fears, and he rode to Wallace Brooke's side and asked to be informed as to what had taken place at the cottage since he left.

We have already described the events of the night, with the exception of the change of base; and Brooke now explained how Scarpole had come to the house and, after being recognized by Abijah Miffin, had agreed to furnish horses and conduct an instant flight. That was all Brooke knew about the matter, except that all had thus far gone well. He added a little emphatic praise of Miffin, however, and Roger was more perplexed than ever.

When in the garden he had heard the two Danites talk in a way which seemed to show that a traitor was in Brooke's house. Naturally, Roger decided it could be no one but the man from Peach Trees, but he was now serving well, according to Brooke's report. Still—

Roger looked at the tall Yankee and at the slight guide. The two were very different in every way, yet they were alike; alike in being persons of mystery. They acknowledged former acquaintance, and Scarpole, at least, seemed able to do about what he pleased in Paradise

Gulch, which was far more than most people could say.

Renewed suspicion entered Roger's mind. Were these two men faithful, or were they conspirators who were leading the fugitives into some new trap?

He rode to Abijah's side.

"How goes the battle?" he asked.

"Middlin', so far," replied the New Englander. "We ain't lost no trupes yit, by bullet-disease nor homesickness, yew know."

"Can we say as much by another night?"

"Naow yew hev me, squire. I ain't a developer o' the future, an' I guess we'll hev tew wait fur ther future tew develop itself."

"What do you know of our guide?"

"Scarpole?"

"Yes."

"A rather comely lad, I think."

"You knew him in the past?"

"Jess so; that is, slightly. When I journeyed tew this air taown, I chanced tew fall in with Mister Scarpole on ther trail. We made the journey tewgether, an' took sort o' a likin' tew each other, an' the boyee said ef I ever wanted a friend in Paradise Gulch, tew apply tew him."

"What is he in Paradise Gulch?"

"Wa-al, I should say he was a boyee, same ez he is out on't," Abijah slowly replied.

"Nonsense! I mean, what is his station, business, situation, there? How can he produce these horses at such short notice? How can he go and come freely, even in Elder Lockdale's house, unlocking doors and releasing prisoners according to his whim?"

Roger spoke incisively, and bent his gaze keenly on the Yankee, but the shades of night prevented his seeing what effect was produced by these pointed questions.

"Wa-al, I swan, you've got me naow!" admitted Abijah, "an' I guess yew'll hev tew apply tew him fur fudder p'int's."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

DEAF DUKE LEADS.

ROGER looked sharply at the man from Peach Trees again, suspicious that there was a hidden meaning in his words, though his manner was as frank and open as ever. But Abijah looked steadily ahead and appeared like anything but a deep, dark plotter.

After some further words, Roger took his advice and rode to Scarpole's side.

"My lad," said he, "what was the meaning of the stifled cry we heard in the grove? It sounded just beside you, and you must know its origin."

The guide looked calmly at his questioner.

"On the contrary, I know no more than you. It sounded from beyond me, but I quickened my pace, instead of going to investigate. Possibly it was only a bird."

"The idea occurred to me that it had something to do with Heavy Hand."

"Heavy Hand?"

"Yes."

"The secret slayer?"

"The same."

"Why do you think that?"

"A fancy of mine," replied Hobart, annoyed at the boy's nonchalant manner, and convinced that he might as well drop the subject. "What are our chances?"

Scarpole looked anxiously toward the east.

"Time only can tell. Day will soon be upon us, and when it is discovered that you have fled, I suppose the Danites will be on your track."

"Do you know Elder Lockdale?"

"No, sir. My acquaintance with the Mormons is practically limited to Harrod. Once, I was his assistant for a month, because he took a fancy to me, but when I learned what work was expected of me, and received light on the ways of the Danites, I deserted him. It was what I learned while with him which enabled me to rescue you from the dungeon, but I am in as much danger—nay, more—from them as you are. I should be torn in pieces if captured."

This explanation was made with a mixture of frankness and anxiety which seemed natural enough, but Roger grew freshly suspicious because of the glint which Scarpole showed. It was as though he had been holding the explanation ready, all the while.

"What is your opinion of Harrod?"

Scarpole shivered.

"A terrible man. He has no more heart than a flint rock, sir."

"And Barwolf?"

"The same of him, except that he is coarser and louder-spoken than Harrod. All who are near Lockdale are heartless; they are like barnacles on a vessel's keel, in that they cling to him as to a natural resting-place."

Hobart pursued his questioning further, but he soon found that it was time thrown away. Scarpole was either frank and honest, or else he concealed artful ways most artlessly, and his interlocutor had to abandon his attempt. He did not, however, abandon his position; he still had doubts in regard to both Scarpole and Miffin, and he decided to watch them both.

Whether the boy was true or false, he made a good guide so far as speed was concerned.

Without putting their horses to a pace which would exhaust them, they were urged into a smart gait and the little party swept away from Paradise Gulch.

The light in the east grew brighter and spread further up the sky, and, in due time, day dawned.

It revealed the fugitives going at an easy gallop.

Scarpole still rode at the head, and he always kept a rod's space between him and those who followed. He often looked back, and if the expression on his face was not one of anxiety, it was well counterfeited. Roger studied his pale, delicate features and found it difficult to believe he was either an ally of the Danites or, as he had at one time suspected, the unseen slayer, Heavy Hand. The cry in the grove might have been a night-bird, after all, as human as was its inflection.

Accordingly, he began to trust the boy more. The fugitives were crossing a fine country; a series of level, flowery plains and fertile hills—the garden of Asa Lockdale's Mormonism. Before noon, however, they would leave this country behind and encounter a more barren one, and, ultimately, a desert.

Further than this none of the party, excepting Scarpole, professed to know, and when he was questioned he did not show a confidence which encouraged those who followed his lead. For many miles, however, there was a lack of water, and this foe must be encountered at the same time they were fleeing from the Danites.

No provision had been made for carrying a supply of water as they entered on the desert, and Hobart could not help thinking that, though they bristled with weapons, they were but illy-prepared for the venture.

The boy guide showed considerable judgment while crossing the succession of plains and hill before mentioned, and, as much as possible, kept hills and trees in a line behind them to break the view of pursuers. Unluckily, there was no way to break their trail, and they felt sure the Danites must be on their track, as relentless as Indians.

Still, they did not at once appear; the hours wore on; night approached and arrived.

They camped in a *motte*, and their horses were given every possible facility for recuperation.

At the end of an hour they went on, and an event of importance soon occurred. Emerging from a piece of timber they saw a lone horseman slowly moving in advance of them. His horse seemed going at a pace of his own choosing, and the man sat in his saddle like a statue. He was already near at hand, and they saw that his garb was that of a rough-and-ready Western man, and his general appearance that of a rover of the wildest part of that region.

As he was directly in their path they soon overtook him, but it was not until his horse looked around and neighed that he gave any sign of life.

Then he deliberately stopped and an exchange of glances followed.

The appearance of the stranger was, on the whole, prepossessing, and as he seemed as much at home as though in his own house, Roger resolved to accost him. This he did with a matter-of-fact salutation, but it was not until it was repeated that the man gave any sign indicating consciousness of the fact.

Then he seemed suddenly to become aware that he was being addressed, and to be galvanized into life. His hands flew to his mouth and ears with gestures which informed them he was both deaf and dumb, but a moment later, he produced a small slate and pencil from his pocket and dashed off a few words.

This he handed to Roger, who found, written in a bold, but exceedingly irregular hand, this question:

"What is wanted?"

Hobart promptly wrote in reply:

"Who are you, friend, and are you well acquainted with this country?"

The man's eyes sparkled, and his hand moved like a flash for a moment. Then the slate was again passed to Roger, who read:

"My name is Deaf Duke, and I am a rover of the West. Do I know this country? Every foot of it; no one better."

With increasing interest Hobart continued the peculiar conversation:

"Are you busy? Will you guide us to Roundtop?"

"Who are you?"

"Travelers, who are in haste."

"Mormons?"

"Why do you ask?"

"Because not a hand will I lift for them, or any of their tribe, man or woman, prophet, Danite, or beggar."

A look of such earnestness accompanied Deaf Duke's last assertion that Roger was moved to believe him sincere, and he promptly wrote:

"We are fugitives from Mormon persecution; we are fleeing from Asa Lockdale's Danites. Guide us safely to Roundtop and you shall be well rewarded."

"Ay, ay, master!"

It was Scarpole who spoke near Hobart's ear, where he had been reading what the other

wrote, and the young man looked at him sharply.

"Waste no time on me," said the boy, curtly. "With Barwolf in pursuit you need all possible time and all honest allies you can get. I do not know this man, but he has an honest look. Mayhap he knows the desert better than I; try him."

Hobart did not answer, but thoughtfully passed the slate to Deaf Duke, feeling, as he did so, that he was getting into deep water where he had no means of sounding.

Deaf Duke read the last message, and scratched, in answer:

"I don't work for money, but I'm always ready to work against the Mormons. I will save you; no one knows Utah better. Come!"

The party resumed its way, with the borderman at the front. Hobart rode beside him, and as they went the slate was used until Deaf Duke had a pretty clear idea of their situation. He seemed really interested, and from the first seemed to verify his boast that he knew the way well.

He was not a handsome man; his complexion was very much like that of a new brick, his hair looked as though it had served as a nest for divers rats and mice, or something of that sort, and one eye was covered with a patch. Yet, beauty was not a necessary quality, just then, and they were satisfied with his appearance.

And thus the party rode on under the blazing sun, which now began to be unpleasantly hot; on, toward the desert for which they were so poorly prepared; on, to meet new and greater dangers, perplexities and misfortunes; rode on, a strangely-assorted party, with more than one secret existing between them.

CHAPTER XXIX.

MYSTERIOUS SCARPOLE.

FROM the time that Deaf Duke took charge of the little band, Roger observed a change in Scarpole's manner. The boy no longer showed an interest in the flight, nor a desire to keep at the head, as before. He fell back to the rear and rode with lowered head, his gaze fixed upon his horse's shoulders.

Hobart's vigilance was sharpened by the momentous circumstances of the case. At Wallace Brooke's earnest request he had taken charge of the party, and he did not underestimate the importance of the charge.

There was the elder Brooke, a man well advanced in years; Lilian Allen, a girl far too noble to fall into the hands of any "addition-table" Mormon; and, last but not least, Edna.

Edna! Hobart's blood thrilled as he looked at her. She was his affianced, and he had formed golden plans for the future, in all of which she had a part. She must be safely taken through to Roundtop, or he would leave his lifeless body on the trail.

The emergency, therefore, quickened his suspicions, if not his perspicacity, and, though Scarpole had advised him to employ Deaf Duke, he decided that the boy's present mood was one of sullenness at being deprived of the lead; the before-mentioned advice might have been but an ill-humored freak of his.

The more Scarpole was watched the more suspicious his actions became. He gradually fell behind the others until he had several yards of open space, and Roger was forced to the conclusion that he was waiting for a chance to desert them entirely.

Accordingly, he fell back beside the boy.

"You are not in so much of a hurry as you were," he curtly observed, as the boy did not seem to hear him.

Scarpole started and turned a pair of startled eyes for a moment full upon the speaker, but he seemed unable to maintain the gaze; they soon fell. He remained silent and seemed confused.

"Did you hear me?" Hobart asked.

"Yes, sir."

"Well, why don't you answer?"

"I did not understand what you meant."

"Then I will explain; this is no time for riddles, either of speech or act. Why do you not keep with the rest of the party, instead of hovering in the rear as though—you were—looking for a chance to—make a bolt?"

Roger spoke somewhat disconnectedly at the close, for it occurred to him that he might be wronging Scarpole, and, in any case, it seemed a one-sided contest for a man of his size to tower over a boy and try to frighten him—especially, such a delicate, melancholy boy as Scarpole.

The eyes were raised again, in a way which seemed timid and hurt, but they soon fell.

"Why should you think that, sir?" he asked, earnestly.

"Perhaps I have no cause; I hope I haven't, and I ask your pardon in advance if I wrong you; but this is a time when I must guard those who depend upon me for help. There are helpless women there, boy, and their safety goes beyond aught else. You are a riddle and mystery to me; there are many things about you I do not understand; and I must ask you to ride near the front of our party all the while."

The eyes were suddenly raised again, and the timid air was all gone. They sparkled with indignation and anger.

"Is this your gratitude?" Scarpole bitterly demanded. "Is it thus you reward me for rescuing you and the girl from the Danites' dungeons?"

"Pardon me if I wrong you, but I am not sure you have done all this. Who abducted Edna Brooke from her father's house?"

"I know not," the boy sullenly replied.

"She was drugged and taken away. By whom? A friend? Scarcely, for that friend would have left her with her father. By Lockdale? No, for he knew not where she was. By whom, then? When Edna recovered she was with the woman who called herself wife Number One, or Victoria. That woman, you say, is your friend. She kept Edna practically a prisoner as long as she chose, and then you took her away. Why was all this done? Who are you who can come and go at your will in Lockdale's house and the Danites' dungeons? You say you were once an ally of Harrod, the spy. Pardon me, but I do not believe that. Harrod would have no use for such an ally as you, or, having had you, he would not allow you to go free and wander about the elder's house and dungeons at your will. I have thought of all this, and that's why I cannot place confidence in you, and why I ask you to ride near the head of the band where I can watch you."

"You are a grateful man!" sarcastically observed Scarpole.

"I intend to protect these helpless girls."

"By turning their friends against them?"

"No," said Roger, seriously. "Such is not my wish, nor do I wish to be harsh with you. Boy that you are, I would be glad to think well of you, after you have released us; to believe you are sincere. But there is a mystery about you I cannot fathom. Once, last night, when the cry sounded from the grove, I thought you might be Heavy Hand, and that you had then scored another victim; but due meditation has caused me to abandon the idea. That slender wrist could never drive a knife with the strength the unseen destroyer shows."

Here Scarpole hurriedly concealed "that slender wrist."

"Still," continued Roger, "there is a mystery about you I do not understand; the abduction of Miss Brooke—of which I believe you know more than you have acknowledged—your freedom about Paradise Gulch, and other things, lead me to reluctantly believe there is a hostile hand, to me unknown, working in the game, and, it may be, working as much against Elder Lockdale as against us."

The boy paid close attention to all that was said, and then suddenly raised his head.

"I swear that I am faithful to you and this party," he earnestly said.

"Dare you claim to be ignorant of how Edna was abducted?"

"That is not my secret."

"Then you will not tell it?"

"I cannot."

Hobart looked steadily at the boy, a frown on his face, but Scarpole met his gaze unwaveringly. There was no longer vacillation or confusion; Roger even thought there was defiance in those steady eyes.

"Your future with this band depends on whether you explain or not," he said, sharply.

"I repeat, I cannot tell."

"You mean you will not?"

"Pardon me, I cannot."

Scarpole's manner was a mixture of firmness, gentleness and entreaty, but Roger understood that arguments would be in vain, and he let the subject drop. His momentary anger gave place to other feelings, which were expressed in words.

"Boy, I am sorry we have cause for trouble after you have released me from prison—and may Heaven forgive me if I wrong you—but, as a compromise, I must ask that you ride near the head of the party, always in my sight."

Scarpole made no answer, but touching his horse viciously with the spur, galloped to the front as though pursued by yelling and hostile Indians.

"Wayward and incomprehensible creature!" muttered Hobart. "He is as little to be analyzed and understood as a capricious woman. Abijah Miffin looks first at him and then at me; what thoughts are in the Yankee's mind? I trust one about as much as the other, yet both have worked with seeming faithfulness for us. Wallace Brooke has no doubt, but I—well, there is a *mystery* about them; I can almost swear to that; and I doubt them seriously."

He rode forward and took his former place beside Deaf Duke, who pushed on steadily, never seeming at a loss as to the proper course to pursue. He seemed zealous, too, and proof against fatigue.

As much could not be said for the majority of the party. Edna, Lilian and Wallace Brooke all showed signs of weariness, though their courage was as good as ever. Lilian's bravery never flagged, and her occasional pleasantries did much to cheer the others.

The afternoon wore away slowly, but very much to the general surprise the Danites did not appear. True, the fugitives had been making excellent time, but they had expected Barwolf's men to do better. The horses of the De-

stroying Angels were said to be the best in Utah, and mile by mile they watched for their appearance.

But they came not, and the sun went down, leaving a scene where our friends seemed to have supreme occupancy.

It had been decided that they should ride until nine o'clock; then rest until three in the morning; then resume. The character of the course they were pursuing was gradually changing from fertility to a hybrid character which foretold the desert they must soon expect, and Deaf Duke had arranged to stop at the last spring on the route.

As a guide, the man had thus far been a success. When once started he showed an inclination to keep his hands away from his slate, and to be silent in the full sense of the word, but no one had questioned his integrity.

Perhaps Hobart would have done so had he not had all he could attend to, to watch Scarpole and Miflin.

When the spring was reached the party halted as agreed upon, supper was eaten, and all lay down to sleep except Duke and Percy Brooke, who had been selected as guards. The deaf man had written that he could just as well do all the work, himself, but Wallace Brooke had been determined to have one man upon whose fidelity he felt sure he could depend, wide awake.

He little knew what a mistake he made in choosing his son, nor what the night was destined to bring forth. When a safe-breaker is set to guard a bank, developments are likely to occur.

CHAPTER XXX.

PERCY FEELS HARROD'S RELENTLESS HAND.

PERCY BROOKE paced back and forth along his allotted beat with an irregular and irresolute step. Now and then he paused and looked toward Deaf Duke's post, but the bushes and darkness made his colleague invisible, and he tramped on. Anon he paused to meditate on the situation.

During the flight, his opinion had never been asked; indeed, all the party seemed to regard him much as a boy. He would have resented this had it not been for the fact that he had lost all claim on them by his treachery.

It was through no good will of his that they were still a united family.

Pacing on his beat, however, Percy revolved a question of importance in his mind. It seemed he was not suspected of treachery, but he was practically deprived of a voice in all proceedings. His father and Hobart thought him weak-minded—a galling fact.

But the worst of all was Lillian's behavior. She treated him with a mixture of aversion and contempt, and it almost seemed as though some intuition had told her that Locke Kellogg's death lay at his door. Percy felt that he had schemed and sinned in vain; that he would never win Lillian through ordinary means; and he was revolving another scheme in his mind.

Was it possible for him to steal the girl away, go far from those who knew them and have her wholly to himself? As he had not yet arrived at the point of entering deliberately upon a life of crime, he had some doubts about such a life being a peaceful one for either of them, but he caught at a straw and hoped she would learn to endure, if not to like him.

Yes, it was worth the trying; if he could lure her away and secure two of the horses, they could flee beyond the reach of foes or so-called friends.

Resolved to act on his idea, he moved away to where the horses were picketed and proceeded to lead two of them aside. This done, nothing remained except to lure Lillian away, but this, unluckily for him, was the hardest part of all.

He paused for a minute before making the venture; he felt that he was not calm enough for it. His hands trembled and his forehead was damp; sure signs of the nervous excitement which swayed him.

The moment was fraught with importance; a short time would decide the matter one way or the other. He hoped for the best but had grave fears. He expected to see Deaf Duke appear, or restless Hobart make a round, or the Danites to descend upon the camp.

"Curse it! what a coward I am!" muttering a very true exclamation he would have resented from other lips. "Am I so weak I cannot do this? We will see!"

He strode forward and was soon in the center of the camp. He saw Lillian and Edna sleeping deeply, side by side, and the recklessness of the plan he had formed occurred to him so strongly that for a moment he recoiled. Failure at that point meant worse than a rebuff.

A moment and he had steeled himself for the crisis. He depended a good deal on Lillian's well-known heroism, and the sooner it was tested, the better.

He touched her arm, and she awoke with a coolness which was surprising and favorable.

"Hush!" he said, softly. "Be brave and silent. There is danger, and all depends on your coolness. Do not venture to speak, but follow me!"

"Edna?" the girl breathed, softly.

"Hobart will care for her; here he comes now. Quick!—father is waiting for you!"

It was a stratagem in which he had the advantage of the darkness, and Lillian fell into the trap. She allowed him to take her hand, and thus they glided away.

Percy was exultant. So far his scheme was succeeding better than he had dared expect, and what he had deemed the worst was past. Victory seemed sure.

"It is only a step," he said, soothingly. "The horses are here, and we must mount and go as silently as ghosts. A few yards in that way and we'll all be together again, and a dash will save us. We are very hopeful."

He talked so fast as to give her little chance to think, much less to ask troublesome questions, and they soon reached the two horses he had selected.

"Now mount!" he said.

Lillian started to do so, but at that moment an arm was passed around her waist and a hand closed her lips beyond the power of giving alarm.

And Percy found himself looking at a small, lithe figure which held Lillian so she could barely stir, at the same moment nodding to Brooke.

"Brother!" said a smooth, dry voice.

Percy fairly reeled back.

"My God!" he gasped.

The new-comer was Harrod.

"I am glad to see you," continued the spy. "We meet under strange circumstances, but none the less pleasantly. Tie the hands of this girl; she struggles too much."

"I can't!" groaned Percy.

"Brother, the league commands it!"

Harrod's voice was low and soft, but to Percy it was as inexorable as that of fate. Many a man would have struck the spy to the ground—or tried to do so—but it never occurred to Percy. He believed he was fully in the power of the Sons of Dan; that he must obey their every command, and that it was sure death to refuse. Yet, he was not disposed to yield without a struggle.

"In Heaven's name, spare me this time—"

"Brother!"

"Perish the word! It is a mockery. Harrod, have you no pity? Will you grind my heart—"

"Brother, tie the cords!"

Cold, calm and even as ice itself, the soft voice of the Danite met the unhappy wretch at every turn. He might as well try to move the solid earth. He yielded with a groan.

"Give them here!"

He took the cords and applied them, and Harrod then gagged his prisoner. She had struggled in vain and was completely in his power, and she ceased her useless efforts at last, exhausted and trembling.

"You have done well, brother," continued Harrod, addressing young Brooke. "The Sons of Dan do not forget those who are faithful, and you seem to me like a true worshiper of Heat and Light. To such Paradise is always open."

"Perdition is more likely to receive me!" groaned Percy.

"What, brother, are you moody? There is no cause for that. Be of good cheer. No one need repine while he is under the bright wing of the Danite elect. Glory awaits us, and your share shall be great. Who so noble, so beloved, as we?"

Harrod had clasped his hands before his heart and his eyes were turned upward, but his utterance was as somber as ever and the fanatic showed more plainly than the man.

Percy shivered; the ideas of this strange man always chilled him like the air of a tomb or a nightmare.

"But we lose time," said the spy, suddenly. "I want the other girl. Go and bring your sister here."

"Edna! I cannot!" said Percy, desperately.

"The Sons of Dan direct it."

"But she will not come."

"She will come as readily as the other girl. Go!"

"Harrod, have mercy. I have followed your lead blindly, but do not ask too much of me. Edna is my sister; would you have me give her over to a slow death? Reflect; remember your own youth; and if you have a spark of pity, show it now!"

The Danite laid his hand softly on his companion's.

"Brother," he said in his gentlest voice, "when Dan speaks we must all obey. There is no other way. Again I say, bring the maiden, and do it speedily. I will have no more time lost. Go!"

The hand Percy had imploringly raised, fell; he gave up the battle then and there. He dared not do otherwise; had he disobeyed the command, every minute would have been miserable through fears of the Danites' vengeance. True, he was not in any sense of the word a member of the band, but Harrod had seen fit to pronounce him one and it amounted to the same thing.

Again, it occurred to him that, now this fatal encounter had revealed to Lillian the fact that he was a traitor, he might as well cast his for-

tunes permanently with the Sons of Dan and rely on them to help him through.

But this was not his choice. Had he dared to risk the attempt, he would have tried to strike Harrod dead at his feet. How he hated the somber fanatic! What joy it would have been to see him writhing on the rack, twisting beneath the thumb-screw, or enduring some other one of the tortures practiced by the people of the Dark Ages.

But he made no attack. He was larger than the spy, but he had a fixed conviction that Harrod could handle him as he would a child; he dared not try it.

He turned and went back to the heart of the camp, while Harrod stood with one arm around his prisoner, as immovable as a rock. But he was neither deaf nor blind. His keen gaze was ever busy, and his sense of hearing was strained to catch the slightest sound. He knew there was a possibility that Percy would betray him, and, though he believed the weakling was in his power, he intended to guard against trouble.

But Percy returned, at last, conducting Edna. She was not slow to realize her danger when she saw the spy, but Harrod had had a good deal of experience in managing women, and he was not at a loss then.

He caught Edna, compressing her mouth under his hand, and placed his revolver to her temple.

"Not a word, or I fire!" he ordered, with cold resolution. "Disobedience means death."

She could not have disobeyed had she so wished, and her strength soon dwindled away to nothing as she saw that her brother appeared to be in league with the terrible Danite. Both girls were placed on the horses, Percy giving his aid with sullen abruptness, and then Harrod turned to his ally.

"That is enough; you can now go," he said, pointing to the camp.

"But I am not going!" surlily replied Brooke.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE HOUR OF DEATH.

HARROD turned his gaze upon the speaker as he would upon a rebellious dog.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"Simply that I am done with them. Do you expect me to stay when my soul is black with treachery, and my record worse than that of a jail-bird? They will soon learn the truth, and then I verily believe my own father would put a noose about my neck and hang me. I cannot return!"

"What, then, will you do?"

"Go with you; join the Danites; anything—"

"There is no room for you among the Sons of Dan," the spy replied, as coldly as ever.

"But you have assured me I was one of them."

"You are sealed to them; that is all," was the unmoved reply. "You are bound to honor, aid and obey them, but years of probation must pass before you can become one of them. The saints of the West take care to expunge all weeds from their garden. Enough! Go; return to your post and say no more."

As he spoke he swung himself into the saddle beside Lillian; then, without a word, he turned the heads of the horses and rode away in the darkness.

Percy Brooke passed his hand helplessly across his face. He felt like one beaten, over-reached and crushed. He had sinned and sinned in vain, and, that night, he had done that which meant sure ruin if his part was discovered. And why should it not be discovered? The only wonder was that it had so long escaped notice.

Still, Percy resolved to let no chance slip, and he shouldered his rifle and resumed his march along the beat. It must be nearly time for him to be relieved, and he meant to play the innocent.

Muttered words fell from his lips as he paced to and fro, the most of which were directed against Harrod. How he hated the man! Cold, somber, immovable, relentless, as unfeeling as a statue, as devoted to the interests of Asa Lockdale as a man of older times to a veritable idol, he had trod upon Percy without a thought.

"I'll kill him if the chance ever occurs!" said the over-reached traitor, grating his teeth.

Soon, the relief guard was posted and he was given a chance to lie down. But he did not sleep. Every minute he expected the absence of Edna and Lillian would be discovered. His blood was at fever heat. At times he thought of arising and deserting his companions, but the poor fool remembered that the desert was on one side and the Danites on the other, and he decided to cling to those who yet trusted him.

As he tossed sleeplessly he looked at the boy, Scarpole, and envied him. Peacefully Scarpole slept; heavily the god of slumber pressed his eyelids down. His deep breathing was that of one lost temporarily to the world after extreme fatigue. Scarpole slept well.

Two hours passed and the time was fast approaching when they were to resume their flight. Percy grew freshly nervous. It would soon be known that the girls were gone, and then—what would be the result?

Hal! what sound was that? The distant bark

of a coyote; a common thing enough to him, yet he started slightly. And what was that? The stifled neigh of a horse? Impossible! There was none so far from camp. And that? It sounded like the tread of a heavy foot, possibly a horse's, but it could not be.

No; a feeling of languor and rest was at last stealing over the young man; he but imagined these things.

He slept.

Perhaps it was five minutes later, or, possibly, ten, when he awoke. The awakening was a rude one, and he leaped to his feet like a flash. Pandemonium seemed let loose. The camp was changed to a place rivaling a mad-house. On every side of him men were struggling, and the sound of revolver-shots was mixed with those of men's shouts and curses.

The camp was attacked.

Percy stood irresolute, but the fight was like a roller on a sea-beach; its force was soon over; it receded and all was over. A hand was laid on Percy's shoulder, and he looked up and saw Barwolf.

"Be wise and long-headed," said the captain, in a deep voice. "You must be a prisoner like the others, or your standing with us will be suspected."

Percy understood, but, before he could answer, his attention was called to Scarpole, who threw up his hands tragically and cried:

"Merciful Heaven! why did I sleep so long?"

There was almost womanly agony and consternation in the cry, but Barwolf laughed harshly.

"We will see directly, my charming boy," he replied.

Then he looked about at the prisoners, and added:

"Where are the girls?"

No one answered. All understood that he referred to Edna and Lillian, but only Percy could have explained their absence, and he did not intend to do so.

Barwolf grew excited when he saw that they were really gone, and he strode fiercely about, seeking them, and vainly calling on Wallace Brooke, Hobart and Abijah Miffin for an explanation. They could not have given one if they would, but Roger noticed that Deaf Duke was missing, and he began to fear that he had suspected the wrong persons when thinking ill of Scarpole and Abijah; that the deaf guide had been a wolf in sheep's clothing, or something of that sort.

New light was vouchsafed the young man when Barwolf strode angrily to Scarpole's side and closed his brawny hand around the boy's slender arm.

"Woman," he cried, "what means this comedy?"

It seemed a singular way to address a boy, but Scarpole disregarded it.

"I do not know," he replied.

"You lie!" shouted the Danite. "You—do you think we do not know you? Wife Number One, your little game is over, and you may as well come down to earth now that, like Icarus, you have lost your wings. You have spirited away the two girls, and I command you to restore them."

Victoria, as we will now call the transformed boy, folded her arms calmly.

"I am unable to obey, since I have no idea where they are. Utterly wearied out, I fell into a sleep which was, unfortunately, too heavy for me to know what was transpiring around me. The girls have disappeared; I know not where. If I did know, I would not tell you."

"You do know," said Barwolf, in his deepest voice; "and it means death to you if you refuse to tell."

Victoria laughed shortly.

"Do as you will; I defy you!" she answered.

"Beware!"

"Of you, Barwolf? Nonsense! The day is past when I fear you. Do your worst, if you will; my life is of no consequence. Once, you were the potent right arm of his austere and awful eminence, Asa Lockdale. Now you are but the noisy tool of a villain named Lockdale. I care not a fig for you!"

Hobart's eyes were opened at last. The mystery of Scarpole was explained, and he saw that they had had no better friend than the ex-wife of the elder. Still, she had so veiled her identity that he could not reproach himself for not having penetrated the mystery.

Barwolf wasted a good deal of breath, but he was forced to the conclusion that the girls had really disappeared as mysteriously as they were said to have done. He gained the idea that Deaf Duke was at the bottom of it, and resolved to hunt Duke down.

When this point was settled, he took Victoria aside.

"Wife Number One," he said, with his ugliest look, "I have a word for your private ear."

Her mouth trembled for a moment with fear, and then she became calm.

"Well?"

"I suspected you would be found with these runaways, and told Elder Lockdale as much. He sent a message to you, mistress."

"Well?"

"It was in three words."

"Well?"

"Prepare to die!"

Wife Number One breathed a trifle harder, but there was no nervous start to show that she felt the dark significance of his words.

"Well?" she repeated, evenly.

"You have exhausted the patience of the gracious elder," the captain added, "and he has resolved on summary measures. He has ordered me to leave you lifeless on the desert. I have no aim in life but to obey him, and I shall do so in the present case. I am going to give you in charge of two men, who will take you a few miles into the desert, to a place where there is but little chance of any other person being, and there end the matter forever."

Victoria looked at him unwaveringly, and no one could have told by a casual glance that she was moved. Yet, to a close scrutiny, there was every evidence that she was. Her heavy breathing, her compressed lips, her restless fingers—all told of emotion firmly held under temporary control.

"Well?" she still repeated.

"Well," he roughly retorted, "we will get rid of you speedily, mistress. Your career as a viper is over!"

He turned aside and selected two of his men, to whom he gave minute directions, and then three of the horses were led out and mounted. To the surprise of all, Victoria made no protestation against going. She ascended to the saddle as calmly as though going on an ordinary trip, the two Danites followed, and then the three rode away toward the east.

Olaf and Eric were the names of the guards, and they looked suitable instruments for the dark and murderous work laid out for them. They rode one on each side of the prisoner, and Olaf kept his hand on her rein.

There was no chance for her to escape.

As they left the camp she heard Barwolf give the order for the others to mount, and knew he intended to take the other prisoner back to Paradise Gulch, and then feet grew to yards and rods between her and them, and she was fairly started on her ominous journey.

She had overheard Barwolf's directions to his men. They were to ride a few hours out on the desert, and, in a lonely place, kill her and leave her body to the dubious mercy of vulture and wolf—if any of the latter chanced that way.

It was a terrible fate to contemplate, but Victoria made no complaint and showed no emotion. It was not wholly bravery that kept her up. It is difficult for one who has lived a pleasant, happy life to understand that prolonged trouble and misery will so benumb heart and brain that all the ills of life, even to the approach of the King of Terrors, can be viewed with indifference, yet such was the state of the unfortunate woman who was under the Mormon elder's ban.

She did not wish to die, but it was better than being in Asa Lockdale's power, and fate seemed to have turned wholly against her.

For a long time the trio rode in silence. Olaf and Eric seemed to have nothing to say, and she certainly did not address them. The night wore on, the gray in the east grew stronger, and morning was over them and over the desert, for they had left the fertile country behind, and the horses walked fetlock-deep in sand.

Victoria looked back, vaguely wondering if her late companions were in sight. There was no sign of them, nor of any living creature. She looked toward the north, east and south with a like result. As far as the eyes could reach they were alone on the desert.

Olaf and Eric were rough looking, even for Danites. The bronze of many a sun, wind and storm was on their cheeks; their hair was long, their beard untrimmed, and more than one scar marked their hands and faces.

The prisoner studied them, though scarcely with any idea of appealing for mercy, but her verdict was that no movement of pity could find place in their minds.

And she was alone on the prairie with them.

At last they looked significantly at each other and paused. A lone tree a hundred yards away was just touched by the first beams of the rising sun, and the east was red, but the desert was still cold and gray.

Olaf laid his hand on Victoria's arm.

"Mistress," he said, "you may prepare to die. We give you a short time for any preliminaries you wish to attend to, and then you must die by the revolver. It's the elder's orders."

He spoke as coolly and unfeelingly as though speaking of a doomed ox, and, under her eyes, changed a cartridge in his revolver, putting in a fresh one—for her!

CHAPTER XXXII.

"UNEASY LIES THE HEAD THAT WEARS A CROWN!"

It was night in Paradise Gulch, and from one end of the place to the other silence and darkness seemed to reign supreme. There were fewer people than usual there to break the

silence, for, as we have seen, Barwolf and many of the hand were on the desert.

Asa Lockdale had been made nervous and nearly ill by the fast-succeeding events, particularly the danger of losing Edna Brooke as a light to his harem, and John Hughson, the "prime minister," had been kept busy. The elder had let both Barwolf and Harrod go with the pursuers, and Hughson became his mainstay.

The prime minister was equal to the demands of the occasion. He was wily, ambitious and unscrupulous, and, being second in Paradise Gulch, he humored Lockdale in all ways and covertly watched for a chance to oust and succeed him.

Until twelve of the night before mentioned, the two men sat and drank, though not heavily enough to turn their hard heads. Then they retired to adjoining chambers to pass the few hours that remained.

Asa Lockdale slept. He was in a condition where wealth and position avail a man but little; where the beggar dreams he is a king, and the king dreams he is a beggar. It is in dream-land only, of all places while we live, that men are truly "free and equal."

Lockdale slept, but not peacefully. There were dark places in his life; the shadow of many a crime fell somberly at his door; and on this night the men and women he had known in the past came and haunted him as Richard III was haunted, if his restless rolling and muttering furnished a criterion.

It was the recollection of wife Number One that troubled him the most. His recent encounter with her had seriously unnerved him, and he now dreamed that she had a second time visited him.

As before, he was alone, and when she commanded him to follow her he dared not disobey. They went from the house, while he vainly watched for a Danite to whom he could appeal for aid; along the street, side by side, while he trembled until his teeth chattered, and to the room where was the secret, sword-encircled well, down which more than one of his victims had gone.

Then he thought she took up these swords and deliberately plunged them in his body, one by one, making painful, though not immediately fatal wounds, and it was under this torture that he rolled and moaned on his couch.

He awoke at last with a start, and sat upright in the bed. He had left a light burning, so all the room was lighted, and what he saw made him recoil with horror as strong, and more real, than that of his dreams.

Before him sat a figure which certainly should not have been in the room, though just what it was he could not tell. Sitting there, it showed no more than a long cloak, which fell to the floor, and a masked head. Some one was undoubtedly inside—yes, he could see keen eyes through the mask—but whether the intruder was man or woman he could not tell.

"Sit still!" said a calm, even voice, which might have been a woman's alto, or a man's barytone.

The command was so sluggishly imperative—it was both—that the elder did not think of disobeying, but he looked imploringly toward the door which separated him from John Hughson.

"I have a revolver here, Lockdale," his visitor continued, "and if you try to raise an alarm, I'll shoot you like the dog you are. Otherwise, I shall not harm you. All I want is to talk with you. On the way you act depends your future. Shall we talk?"

The voice was a peculiar monotone, with a tinge of the imperative element in it, but still mysterious as to the sex of the speaker. For all that it was enough to bend Lockdale, and his dry lips framed, almost unconsciously to him, one husky word of answer:

"Yes!"

"Very good. Do you know me?"

"No."

"I am Heavy Hand!"

The announcement was quietly made, but it was enough to make Asa Lockdale shrink back, grow pale and tremble more than ever. For he still feared the unseen destroyer—who was now making himself unpleasantly visible—despite all the boasts of Barwolf that he would find and kill him.

"Possibly you've heard of me?" the visitor added.

"Yes."

"I thought so. Other Mormons have, though some of them will never tell what they know. When I strike, my marked men seldom tell any tales. Where are Rudolph, Tudor and the rest?"

"Dead," the elder faintly admitted.

"Ay, but they are not all who will die. I am Heavy Hand, and the marked men of Paradise Gulch are not all gone. You, Elder Lockdale, are one of them!"

The visitor spoke as monotonously and coldly as ever; there was not a shade of menace perceptible in his voice; but the chief of the Mormons shivered pitifully.

"Why do you speak of me?" he asked, feverishly. "What have I done? I am sure I never wronged you."

A low, mocking laugh left Heavy Hand's lips. "What have you done? Go ask Roger Hobart, ask Locke Kellogg, ask Abijah Miffin, ask the poor, helpless women you call your wives. One and all will give the same answer; they will say you have broken hearts and heads in a promiscuous way to reach your own end. You claim to represent true Mormonism. Well, perhaps you do; I can't say; but, exiled by Brigham Young and shunned by all his followers, you are running a private scheme of your own here which the English language cannot describe in fit terms. Lockdale, you are a demon!"

"You wrong me!" said the elder, earnestly. "These people have lied to you—I mean Hobart and the rest. I assure you my methods have been honest and upright in all cases."

"Bah! go tell me the sun is made of burnished gold. Asa Lockdale, I do not depend on Hobart, Miffin, or any of the rest, but on what I, myself, know, and I know you better by far than any of them. You are a fiend, Lockdale, and, for that reason, I intend to grind your body under my heel as you have ground the hearts of those who have hearts, and, at the end, to kill you like some foul cur who has become an intolerable nuisance to the public. Ay, you shall die, Lockdale, despite your body-guard of Danites; despite Hughson, Harrod and Barwolf. I swear it!"

The elder moved nervously on his couch. Who and what was this remarkable man, who came and went in his own house so strangely, and who defied the power of the Danites? What was the grudge he held against the Danites and their chief?

Vainly Lockdale wished he had a weapon then—and dared to use it—or that he could call aloud and alarm Hughson. Hundreds of dollars would he have given to see the slayer dead, for he feared him more than any other living man, but he knew one rash movement would result in his own doom.

"Have you nothing to say?" Heavy Hand asked, a tinge of sharpness in his voice.

"What can I say, when you persist in wrongdoing me?" Lockdale asked, in return.

"You had better say nothing than to deal in flimsy denials. Bah! do I not know you well? Dog that you are, I know you for the foulest wretch in Utah."

"Man, who are you?"

"Your master!"

"Will you show your face?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"Because when you see it it will be like a lightning-bolt to you; in that hour you will die."

The slayer, speaking so evenly, did not dream of the sudden, desperate scheme that was in Lockdale's mind, but the latter had determined to see that face, cost what it might.

"Do I, then, know you?" he continued.

"Perhaps," Heavy Hand admitted.

"We speak of you as a man. Are you that, or are you a woman?"

"Wait patiently, and you shall know when the grand *dénouement* occurs; when you are torn from your place of power and dragged through dust and blood to your fate."

"I will know now!" the elder shrilly cried; and as he spoke he flung himself forward and clutched wildly at the mask which concealed the visitor's face.

The effort was not wholly successful. Heavy Hand was as quick as he, and as his fingers wrapped around Lockdale's wrists, the latter felt that his *sobriquet* was appropriate in more than one sense.

But though his first attack was foiled, the elder did not give up tamely. He fought like a wildcat, seeking to tear away the mask, or to scratch his visitor, but never striking out as one would expect a man to do.

All in vain! He was in the hands of one his physical superior, and he was forced back on the edge of the bed with a relentless hand.

"Demon!" he exclaimed, "I am tempted to strangle you where you are!"

Lockdale's lips unclosed and he sent forth a cry for help which arose shrilly on the night-air; one wild, weird cry. It was not repeated. The slayer's hand closed over his throat, shutting off further sounds, and then a hard fist was dashed in his face.

The elder's senses reeled, strange lights flashed before his eyes, a mountain's weight seemed upon his chest, and in the wildest terror he thought that he was about to die; he who had such a load of sins on his record.

Then consciousness deserted him.

And when John Hughson, alarmed by the cry he had heard, came rushing in, his master lay white and motionless on the edge of the bed.

There was no sign of Heavy Hand.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE ELDER'S HOUR OF TRIUMPH.

ELDER LOCKDALE slowly returned to consciousness, and, opening his eyes, glared wildly around him. The dread form he feared to see

was no longer visible; Heavy Hand had disappeared; and Hughson and Harrod, the spy, were bending over him.

There was every evidence that they had worked to restore him to his senses, and he experienced sudden relief, but he did not forget his late visitor.

"Where is he?" he cried.

"Where is who, sir?" Hughson asked.

"Heavy Hand!"

Both his hearers started, and Hughson, the more demonstrative of the two, recoiled.

"What!" he exclaimed, "has the slayer been here?"

"Yes, in this very room, and he strangled me nearly to death. He has been gone but a moment; put the Danites on his track at once. Right, Harrod!"

The spy had glided away with his usual lithe and silent way, and the elder asked Hughson to remain with him. He felt that he would never again dare to be alone, even by day.

Harrod did his work well and the Danites were put on the track, but they might as well have searched for a dew-drop of a past generation. The unseen destroyer had gone and left no sign; they could not even find where he had entered the house; and after long and fruitless efforts they abandoned the attempt.

Harrod returned and made his report to the elder, who paced the floor excitedly as he listened.

"Gentlemen," he exclaimed, "who and what is this creature?"

Hughson hesitated and then looked at the spy. The latter's face was as impressive as usual; it told no tales. The prime minister looked back to his master and then shook his head.

"I have no theory," he said.

"You call yourself a sagacious man," peevishly observed Lockdale.

"I think I have proved it in the past, sir, but this mystery is too obscure for me."

"And you, Harrod?"

"I hold to my old opinion," said the spy. "Some man hates us, fancies we have done him wrong, and is thus seeking for revenge."

"A man! I call him a fiend incarnate."

"A difference of terms only. He is shrewd and cunning, and it will require care on our part to unmask and seize him. That we shall know him sooner or later I cannot doubt, my master. Why is life vouchsafed us except that we may serve you and do your pleasure?"

The spy folded his arms, lengthened his somber face and looked at the elder as an idolater would look at the image he esteemed above all others.

"I hope you'll get him," muttered Lockdale, but little influenced by this veneration.

"Ay, that we shall. Do not suppose such a creature is to be allowed to prey upon the select of the earth, the worshipers of Fire and Light."

Hughson shivered. It always gave him a nervous, uncanny feeling when the spy fell into his fanatical moods; he suspected he was either partially insane or in league with the Evil One.

"But I am forgetting one thing, my master," said Harrod, in his even way, and without a trace of animation. "I was coming here with good news when this event caused me to forget it for the time. The maidens are captured!"

Both Lockdale and Hughson sprang to their feet.

"What maidens?" the elder cried.

"Edna Brooke and Lilian Allen."

"Captured—and where are they?"

"In this house, my master."

"Is it possible? How did it happen?"

"Simply through judicious pursuit," answered Harrod, who then told how he had used Percy Brooke as a means of getting the girls from the camp on the edge of the desert, adding that he had then taken them back to Paradise Gulch with all possible speed.

The elder was delighted, and in the first flush of his joy he lost all dignity and shook hands with Harrod and Hughson, ending with a dance which was expressive of joy, if not of grace.

Hughson was not less pleased, for he had been promised Lilian Allen, himself, and he met the elder point for point, except that he did not dancing.

This was not all the good news Harrod had to tell. He had happened upon Barwolf, shortly after he secured the girls, and had directed him so that he could not fail to capture the rest of the runaway party.

Consequently it seemed that victory had perched on the Mormon banner to remain, and Lockdale grew so exultant that he forgot Heavy Hand for the time.

Whether Heavy Hand forgot him remains to be seen.

The day was drawing to an end when Barwolf walked with his centurion stride into the room where the elder and Hughson were seated together. He saluted with military precision, but Lockdale sprang up quickly.

"What news, Barwolf?"

"I have the honor to report that the fugitives are all once more in the dungeons."

"Brooke, Hobart and—"

"All of them. Young Brooke sends word that he wishes to see you."

"Let the fool decay in prison!" the elder

scornfully cried. "He has served our purpose, and we want no more of him."

"It's just as well, I fancy," Barwolf agreed.

"Did you say *all* were there, captain—all?" the elder pursued.

Barwolf looked at the prime minister.

"Speak freely," said Lockdale.

"One person whom we found with the party is not there. I refer to wife Number One."

"Where is she?"

"I obeyed your orders, sir, and sent her to the heart of the desert, accompanied by Olaf and Eric. She will not return."

"Excellently done, good Barwolf. You shall drink of the best wine I have in stock. By the way, what said the woman when she found herself in the toils?"

"She was as cool as an old soldier, and went away defying you, sir, and all the Danites."

"No pleading, eh?"

"None, sir."

Lockdale frowned.

"She has an ugly disposition, by my faith, and it's well she is—a—not likely to trouble us more. Olaf and Eric will do their work well."

"There's no doubt of that; they are heartless cut-throats," said Barwolf, with a bluntness which made the elder wince a trifle.

"We shall be well rid of her," he said.

Barwolf went out, and then came Harrod to say that Percy Brooke was demanding to see Lockdale; that he was in a wild state, and seemed liable to lose his mind if he was not gratified, or calmed, in some way.

The elder frowned, but directed that Brooke be brought before him, "properly guarded." He came, walking between two Danites, who guarded him as though he was a bold and desperate outlaw.

But Percy looked like anything else; he seemed more like a condemned murderer, who had lost all courage the night before his execution.

He came with his hands bound behind him and his dress disordered, which last remark may also be applied to his hair. It had not seen a comb for two days, and hung in long, tangled masses over his head. His face was pale in all parts except at his cheeks, where were two crimson spots, like the hectic flush of disease.

Add to this the fact that he was wild and desperate, and a faint idea of his appearance may be obtained.

Asa Lockdale, however, had seen desperate men—and women—before that day, and he looked at him with a cold, unmoved face.

"Well," he said, curtly, "what do you want of me?"

"I want justice!" hoarsely answered the young man.

"Do not speak in parables."

"I want reward for what I have done for you. Sir, you owe me more than you can easily pay, for I have not only helped you to accomplish your end, but I have sold my soul for you and to you."

"If the price was large, I have been cheated," coldly observed the elder.

"Do not mock me!" wildly cried Brooke.

"Then do not be absurd. What do you want?"

"Justice!"

"Possibly that would be the rope."

Percy struck the floor with his foot in almost frenzied anger, and Hughson vainly looked at his master to suggest a different course of treatment.

"Beware!" shouted Percy; "I will kill you if I ever get the chance!"

"You never will," said the elder, coldly.

"Beware of Heavy Hand!"

"You are not he," said Lockdale, coldly.

"You lack the pluck to be such a man."

Brooke's head fell forward with a groan. He was in a mood when he was practically beyond his own control, and he went rapidly from fury to despair.

Hughson, however, seized the opportunity to whisper to the elder, and the latter more moderately asked:

"What do you desire, anyway?"

The drooping head came up quickly.

"Elder Lockdale, consider my position. A few days ago I was one of a happy household. Doubtless I was the black sheep of the family, but there was no real stain on my character. Unfortunately for me, I loved my cousin, Lilian Allen, and, seemingly loved in vain. She favored a rival, whose name was Locke Kellogg. I am sure I should never have raised a hand against them had not John Hughson come to me in my hour of weakness and proposed that I sell my soul. Such was not his mode of expression, but it amounted to that. I was to betray Kellogg, and in return the Danites would be my fast and true friends."

"Well?"

Lockdale spoke the monosyllable coldly, as Percy paused for a moment, but the latter did not seem to hear it.

"I yielded," he added, moodily—"I sold myself to you and your men. What has been my reward? Nothing! John Hughson promised that I should have Lilian Allen for my wife—that the Danites would help me to that end;

but, instead, I am held prisoner, and it looks very much as though Lilian is destined for some other man."

Lockdale was about to retort that she was—that Percy might as well chew the morsel at present between his lips, since he could get no other; but a motion from the more wily prime minister checked the answer. Taking his cue from the motion, he answered:

"Your questions require time in answering, and, as Hughson and I have business to attend to, we will leave you here for about ten minutes. On our return you shall have a definite answer."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

KNAVERY OVERREACHES ITSELF.

THE ten minutes agreed upon passed slowly, but Asa Lockdale returned promptly at the designated time. The prime minister ostensibly remained behind, though still standing within hearing, but just out of Percy's sight.

The elder pretended to give renewed attention to the subject, and asked young Brooke for the full account of his association with Hughson, Harrod and Barwolf. Percy was not backward about telling, and the story lost nothing by his manner of telling.

Lockdale then expressed some surprise, and said he had not before been fully informed on the subject. He added that his agents had exceeded their authority, but, since it was so, their promises must not be broken.

Then he paced the room for several minutes with bent head and a thoughtful frown, at the end of which time he came back and faced Percy, looking sharply into his eyes.

"My friend, how is your conscience?"

"My conscience?"

"Yes. Is it elastic, or not?"

"Elastic enough, so I intend to look out for myself when I can, be the means what they may," Percy replied, somewhat rashly.

"Good! I am glad to hear you answer in such a manly style, and so much like the men I delight to favor and honor. Well, then, let me say that I am inclined to help you; to make you a leader in our Zion, and—the husband of Lilian!"

The drooping head came up, the look of sullen desperation changed to one of sudden hope, but Percy wavered, after a moment's thought.

"You will do this?"

"Yes," the elder replied.

"But what becomes of Hughson's claim?"

"He has agreed to abandon it on condition that I give him new honors as a leader of the faithful."

"And you will give me Lilian Allen?"

"Yes."

Percy's face flushed with hope.

"Do that," he cried, "and I'll be the most faithful of the men who do your bidding."

"There are conditions attached to the offer."

"I care not if there are a score. To win Lilian I will plunge into dissipation, crime, anything; I will betray my brethren and redden my hands with blood. Name the conditions, sir, and you'll find me ready!"

The elder's cold eyes lit up with a faint gleam of triumph, but he managed to hide from Percy the extreme pleasure he felt.

"Very well; your share is simple. Will you hear my plan by which Lilian shall marry you, and Edna marry me?"

One moment the young villain's conscience did reproach him, for he had liked his sister, and he knew she had better die than to become one of Lockdale's many wives, but he was past the Rubicon and he replied:

"I am listening, sir."

"I wish your charming sister to become Mrs. Lockdale without any disturbance, so I have formed this plan: It is a peculiar feature of Mormon weddings in Paradise Gulch that both bride and groom are veiled; so completely veiled that they cannot recognize their companion in the ceremony. Therein lies your hope. You will go to the fair maidens and tell them that I have approached you to prevail on them to marry me and Hughson, respectively; and that you advise them to go through the ceremony, because it will not be legal, and, afterward, they will have the freedom of the house. This will be the argument by which you will deceive them, and you can add that, after the ceremony, it will be easy for them to escape; whereas, if they refuse, they will be kept in the dungeon as long as I see fit, and then compelled to marry. See?"

"I see your idea," said Percy, who had been vainly trying to interrupt; "but there is a flaw in the plan. I have lost all influence with the girls. Remember that I was trying to abduct Lilian when Harrod happened on us, at the desert camp, and that I then helped him. When I did this I showed my hand; the girls discovered my treachery; and I might as well try to convince them I am an angel as to influence them to such a step."

"Wrong!" the elder observed, with a cold smile.

"Wrong?"

"Yes."

"Why so?" irritably demanded Brooke.

"Because all this has been thought of before, with a view to the fact that you might aid us by more secret work, and the girls have been made to believe you were trying to save them by secret means, and that you aided Harrod simply because your life depended on it. Oh! you need have no fear; Edna regards you as her 'dear brother,' the same as of old, and the fair Lilian has forgotten her temporary doubts."

It did not seem possible to Percy that all this had been accomplished, but the elder spoke so positively that he had to accept the statement as true, and he confessed that the main part of the scheme was good. Edna and Lilian, in their captivity, would catch at any chance which promised escape, and as a marriage ceremony of the Mormon sort would not be legal, since the grooms were already a good deal worried, it would open to the prisoners a chance of escape he believed they would improve.

But would they trust him?

This was the main point, and all the elder's arguments failed to give him confidence, though he agreed to the plan.

Something brought to his mind even then a question he had often asked himself during the last few hours, and he asked it of Lockdale:

"Do you know any one called Deaf Duke?"

"Deaf Duke? No. Who is he?"

"A borderman."

"I never heard of him. Can't you tell me more?"

Percy did tell more, describing how he had been their guide during a part of their flight, and how he had mysteriously disappeared from his beat when placed as a picket at the desert camp.

"Our party had various theories in regard to him after our capture," he added. "Hobart insisted that his deafness had been a sham, that he was one of your men, and that he betrayed us into the Danites' hands."

Lockdale shook his head.

"I know nothing about it. Describe him."

Percy did so, and added a minute description of his connection with the fugitive party. Much to his surprise, the elder seemed troubled, and added many questions which showed a deep interest. Percy, however, could give little real information, and the subject was finally dropped.

Convinced that he had added young Brooke to the list of his tools, the elder ordered the Danites to release him, and to take him to the cell where Edna and Lilian were confined together.

The planned trick must be tried at once.

This done, the trio went out and Hughson re-entered. Prime minister and master laughed heartily.

"The plot works well," said Hughson. "The fair girls will soon be ours, while our idiot helper will be left like a played-out ship—high and dry on the beach."

"He bit at the hook like a foolish fish," said the elder, chuckling. "Hughson, that Shakespeare was a wise fellow when he said: 'What fools these mortals be!' A long head had Shakespeare."

The prime minister agreed to the assertion with the promptness of one who considers a question settled by undisputable authority, and an animated conversation ensued. The elder, however, did not forget one subject which was on his mind.

"Did you overhear what was said about the guide who called himself Deaf Duke?"

"Yes, sir."

"Who is he?"

"I never heard of him before."

"You speak very calmly, and I suppose you do not suspect any thing. What is your theory?"

"Simply that he is some wanderer of the plains; one of the many bordermen who move nomadically over all the West."

"Such is not my theory, and you have heard that all Brooke's party declined to accept it after their capture. They decided that he was more than he assumed to be; I assert the same thing. Hughson, I have a startling theory."

"What is it, sir?"

"That Deaf Duke was Heavy Hand!"

The prime minister recoiled. His horror of the strange foe of the Danites was less than Lockdale's, for he had seen him less, but he was not blind to the fact that men who were of value to the rulers of the city had been falling mysteriously, and there was no knowing how soon the dread destroyer would strike at those high in office—Barwolf, Harrod, Lockdale—or John Hughson.

So John Hughson was interested.

"What gives you that idea?" he asked.

"Nothing tangible, I confess, but the appearance of a man who knew the way across the desert was off a piece with what preceded it. Query: Has Percy Brooke lied to us when telling of their flight from Paradise Gulch, or was he lied to? Are there means of entering and leaving this building which are unknown to us?"

"I would not have believed it a few days ago,

but, from the time wife Number One vanished so strangely, there have been many strange happenings here."

"Still, we can find no secret passages."

"We have not yet succeeded."

Lockdale paced nervously back and forth.

"I feel like a man living on the brink of a volcano," he said. "The shell may at any moment fall in and send me to ruin. Here in Paradise Gulch I am supposed to be supreme, and my Danites will cut a throat any time at my beck or nod, but there is no denying the fact that there is a screw loose somewhere. What is the cause of it?"

"In my opinion," Hughson replied, "three words will explain it: wife Number One!"

"Hal! hal! it's little damage she will do after this. Olaf and Eric have done their work before now, and the woman has gone the way of all the earth. Her mischief-making is over; Olaf and Eric are butchers who never neglect a chance to practice their trade. But, it is high time we were preparing for our wedding. Come, my dear fellow, and let us show Percy Brooke—poor fool!—how he has overreached himself!"

They went out, and for awhile the room was without an occupant. At the end of ten minutes two veiled figures entered, and the late speakers were ready for their share in the work they had planned.

So were the others, for Percy had come to Barwolf to report that he had succeeded with Edna and Lilian. The scene at the desert camp had been smoothed over so that they received him as a friend, and his iniquitous trap was laid before them.

He talked well. He had been approached by the elder, he said, and had pretended to yield, but, in reality, he was on the alert to save the girls. They had but to consent to the marriage, which would be only a farce, and, thus securing the freedom of the house, could soon escape; and the same bargain would give him—Percy—liberty, and enable him to release the rest of their friends.

The scheme worked well; Edna and Lilian entered the net; and Percy came to Barwolf to announce that the girls were ready.

The double-dyed traitor was surprised at what occurred; he was immediately seized, bound and gagged, and as he stood helpless among the Danites, the centurion's lips curled scornfully. Still, he offered no explanation, and Percy, unable to speak, could only look the questions he would angrily have asked had the power of speech still been his.

At the end of ten minutes, however, he was led from the room and along the hall toward a second apartment he knew to be the elder's. At the door they paused.

"You are to look inside here," said Barwolf, "for what you will see will doubtless prove interesting, but I warn you not to attempt any violence. My revolver will be at your head, and if you are ugly I'll blow out your brains. Look!"

Percy obeyed. He saw several persons, and four, deeply veiled, were taking their places before an oily-looking man, who might be a minister, as though to be married.

Brooke started back. The whole truth broke upon him. He had been overreached, tricked, used as a cat's-paw, and Lockdale and Hughson were about to reap the fruits of his unavailing treachery.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE DRAMA OF THE DESERT.

MID DAY!

The sun, having reached the zenith, hung like a ball of fire in the heavens, its heat being in keeping with the comparison. The heat was intense, and on the desert which lay to the east of Paradise Gulch, it seemed to be at its full power. The sand glistened whitely under the torrid rays, until each particle seemed a glittering diamond surcharged with heat.

If Old Sol possessed eyes and a brain, he must have noticed the scarcity of animated life on the desert. Here, there was a skulking wolf; there, a dirty-colored buzzard. Still oftener, one might see a lizard, venturing from the shadow of a bush which managed to live somehow in that desolate place, had succumbed to the heat and turned upon his back with a wilted aspect.

At one point, life was more observable, for there riders were pursuing their way across the burning sands.

They were Olaf and Eric, the Danites, and Victoria, the unfortunate wife of Elder Lockdale.

Wife Number One had discarded the dress worn when she appeared as Scarpole, the boy guard, and from garments left at the camp by the ladies of the fugitive party, had once more donned the proper habiliments of her sex.

The journey through the desert was a gloomy, unpleasant one. It would have been that in any case, with the burning sun above and the barren sand beneath, but it also partook somewhat of a funeral nature; Victoria was going to her appointed place of execution, and she knew it.

Despite this, she never lost her calmness.

We do not say courage, for there had been a time when she seemed wholly destitute of that divine quality, but long-continued misfortune had given her a desperate calmness which seemed much like it.

She was Asa Lockdale's wife, and Lockdale had decreed that she should die. For the purpose of slaughter she was being taken to the heart of the desert, where there was little danger that any one would interfere, or learn her fate, and where her end would be as dreary and barren as the life she had lived.

She was not ready to die. True, life seemed to have nothing for her in the way of hope, but it contained a thing stronger even than hope—vengeance.

Hers was a ruined life. A ruined life! Those who are happy and well situated can but faintly imagine what that means, but the unfortunate woman who was riding over the desert had tasted to the dregs of the cup and knew but too well what it meant. And that her lot was so bitter was owing to one person; to him who had for years ground her heart under his relentless heel; to Asa Lockdale, Mormon. Right or wrong, she wished to see him hurled from power, disgraced and miserable.

For that, alone, she wished to live.

She had spoken to Olaf and Eric, her guards, and tried to touch their hearts, but not a word would they answer, and their faces showed no pity.

Both were rude, rough, stalwart men. If Bar-wolf looked like a centurion, Olaf and Eric looked as though they might have just finished a ten-years' campaign on the tented field, under a tropic sun and where the elements warred fiercely. Broad-faced, bronzed, upright, soldierly, stern—they did not seem like men who could be moved to pity, and Victoria soon abandoned the attempt.

She had never seen one of Elder Lockdale's cut-throats who could be moved to pity.

As the sun reached the zenith, the trio neared a lone tree on the desert. From its top a dirty-hued buzzard arose on indolent wing, mounted a trifle in the air and then flapped lazily away toward the north.

Olaf and Eric exchanged glances. The same thought had entered the mind of both. If wife Number One was left dead under the tree, this bird of prey, reinforced by others, would soon gather at the spot.

Not a word was spoken, however.

Under the tree they halted. Victoria was helped down; the horses were unsaddled and unbridled; the food brought along for their use was given them. Then, while Eric took bread, meat and bottled water from their own store, Olaf turned to Victoria.

"Mistress," he said, stolidly, "you will not eat with us. You will need no more food in this world. You know why we were sent here; it is Elder Lockdale's order that we leave you dead on the desert. We are about to perform our duty. We shall kill you promptly when we begin; one stroke and the deed will be done. We give you until we have finished dinner to prepare."

Had Olaf been a machine, his voice and manner would not have been colder, or more stolid. There was not the slightest gleam of pity in his eyes, nor a shadow of doubt on his coarse, brutal face. He would do the deed as coolly as though he had to smite a bullock in the sham-bles.

Pale as snow was the face of Victoria. She had expected what she heard, yet she did not hear with calmness. What one of us could? Life is sweet, even though it be hopeless and dark.

Olaf turned away and sat down where Eric had spread out a blanket and placed food upon it. The two men began to eat with a relish.

Then Victoria found her voice and made a plea which was eloquent. It was the voice of a woman's heart. It should have touched theirs, but neither gave the slightest evidence that he had heard.

Useless! useless!

She dropped at the foot of the tree and watched the men with a dumb horror. How could they eat thus when the shadow of murder fell on their pathway? Eat they did, and with a relish which was strange and weird. How could they forget that the hands with which they handled the food would soon be red with blood?

Victoria would have fled had she possessed the strength. True, her hands were tied, and either of the men could have run her down, but was not her life at stake? But she could not run. A fatal weakness was upon her; it penetrated to every muscle; she could but crouch dumbly under the tree and watch the assassins as they ate.

And overhead circled the buzzard, indolently, hoping to share in the repast—or in another.

Victoria saw him and shuddered.

How fast the men ate! True, their jaws moved but slowly, but the food disappeared terribly fast. How could it be? It was the fancy of one whose mind was weakening under the strain upon it.

Morsel by morsel the food disappeared. Neither man slighted it. Neither lacked a good

appetite. Neither lost anything by a recollection of the near future. Neither seemed conscious that a feebly woman crouched near at hand in dumb despair, waiting for death.

Yet, they were to be her executioners.

They arose. Each carelessly brushed the crumbs from their clothing. There was not a tremor of their hands. Then Olaf looked at the sun.

"We must lose no more time. Will you strike the blow, or shall I?"

Eric faced his companion.

"Olaf, I think the blow had better not be struck," he evenly said.

Olaf shrugged his shoulders.

"You know our orders. Well, if your heart is soft, I will do the deed. Give me your cut-lass."

"No!" said Eric, calmly.

"Mine is too heavy."

"Keep it in your belt, Olaf. I said I thought the blow had better not be struck, and I repeat what I said. Comrade, why should we do this deed? It is one only fit for tigers. Let the woman live."

An angry look was mounting to Olaf's face.

"Remember our orders!" he said.

"I remember," calmly replied Eric.

"The orders of Asa Lockdale."

"Ay; I remember. For years I have done his bidding like a patient ox, and as a hired butcher have gained some renown. Now, he asks too much of me. I cannot kill this helpless woman in cold blood. I had a mother once, and her voice would cry from the grave against me."

Olaf uttered a coarse and profane exclamation expressive of his contempt for Eric's scruples, as well as his anger.

"Fool!" he added, "of what are you thinking? Do you forget you are one of the Sons of Dan, and that Asa Lockdale is your master? Would you lose the future opened for those of our craft? Bah! I will do this work quickly, and let you whine anon."

He started toward Victoria, but Eric barred his way.

"Stop!" was the sturdy command. "Wife Number One is not to die thus!"

Olaf uttered another oath.

"Out of my way!" he cried, "or I'll cleave your head in two at one blow!"

He drew his short, stout sword with a jerk as he spoke; but Eric did not waver in the least.

"I shall not move," he coolly said. "I have thought carefully on this subject and come to a conclusion. This woman does not deserve death, and you can only reach her by passing over my dead body!"

Victoria had arisen to her knees and was eagerly listening and watching. She comprehended the situation fully. Somehow, the heart of Eric had been touched, and he meant all that he said. But was he capable of facing Olaf successfully?

The odds seemed against him. He was a stout, sturdy man, but Olaf stood six feet in his bare feet, and was correspondingly broad—a veritable giant he was, and accustomed to weapons as a child to his toys. His sword, too, was longer and heavier than Eric's.

All this Victoria noted, and she trembled for the man who had thus become her champion. Nine men out of ten would have bet against him and in favor of Olaf, and wife Number One felt that his cause was a desperate one.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

ERIC'S GREAT BATTLE.

OLAF remained speechless for several seconds.

The stand taken by Eric was a complete surprise to him, for he had never discovered that the man was more soft-hearted than the average Danite. On the whole, he had thought well of Eric—though not a man to become attached to any one—and he was sorry to see him thus turn against the decree of Dan.

"Look ye, Eric," he said, "this is sheer folly. I am going to be faithful to Elder Lockdale, and if you are false, your position in Paradise Gulch will be lost. I shall surely tell what has occurred. Come, stand aside, and let me finish this job, and then we'll drink together from my flask and forget it all."

"Olaf, you might as well talk to the winds of the desert. I am not to be moved. I say this woman shall not be harmed while I live; I say I will fight to the last to protect her; and I mean just what I say. If you insist on trying to kill her, we must fight."

He spoke with inflexible calmness. Knowing Olaf well, he felt sure that the combat could not be avoided, and so wasted no words upon him.

"Devils alive!" cried the big Danite, "I will cut you to pieces!"

And he flourished his sword wildly.

"Perhaps," said Eric.

"Fool! do you forget how many times I have disarmed you in practice? Did you ever take my sword from me? Am I not far more skillful than you? Is not my wrist doubly strong? Out upon you for an idiot! Why will you throw your life away? By my soul, if I cross swords

with you I will cleave your head in twain! Out of my way!"

Olaf gave his sword another flourish, but his companion did not move. He was not to be turned from his purpose, though he knew he was engaging in a desperate cause. Olaf had always been his superior with the sword, and, though he had gained somewhat of late by diligent practice, he had no reason to suppose the scale of superiority had tipped in his favor.

Still, believing the other man his master, he was firmly resolved to risk his life for the helpless woman who knelt praying on the sand; to risk and lose it, if need be.

That he would win seemed a supposition against all the dictates of reason.

The big Danite continued his argument for awhile longer, but when he saw that Eric was not to be moved, he lost his temper and cursed him soundly.

"I will not ask you again," he said, waving his sword aloft, "but I am about to advance, and if you do not get out of my way I'll cut you down."

"Think twice," said Eric. "There is a possibility that you might be the one to get hurt. Better abandon your plan and let the woman alone."

"Never, curse you! I'll cut you down, and then kill her. Look out! I'm coming!"

Giving his sword another flourish, he advanced, but Eric stood firm and his bronzed face showed no signs of fear. It was not that he had confidence, but that war was his trade. In truth, he expected Olaf to cut him down, but he would not see the other butchery done and speak no word.

Seeing that he would not give way, Olaf struck furiously, and then the swords crossed with a dull clang. Then the battle began in earnest. Blows were given and returned, parry followed thrust, and the sound of steel arose where it had probably never before been heard.

Eric fought coolly and steadily, wasting no strength and using good judgment. For awhile Olaf went at him in sledge-hammer style, resolved to cut him down at the start, but as he saw the firm guard opposed to him, he abandoned this style of warfare and became at once calmer and more dangerous.

Victoria watched with a nervous state of suspense never before known to her. Whether she lived or died depended on the result of that fight, but there was more than that at stake. Her sympathies had been powerfully aroused for Eric. Somehow, he seemed like a gladiator who, in the arena, forgets to slay and espouses a noble cause.

He was three inches shorter than Olaf, and over a score of pounds lighter, and she grew surprised and freshly interested when she saw that he did not go down under the first assault.

Still, it was clear that the big Danite was the better swordsman. He drove Eric steadily backward, and by a vigorous assault kept him always on the defensive.

Had Victoria's hands been at liberty she would have tried to help him, but, as it was, she could only pray for his safety and success. Suddenly a cry broke from her lips.

The woman's blood seemed to grow cold as she saw the big Danite's sword pierce her defender's body, and being withdrawn, bring out a gush of blood.

The first wound had been given, and Eric was the victim, but he gave ground no more than before.

How Victoria admired him then! Over-matched, he was battling with a courage surprising to see, and his eyes never quailed as he looked into those of his enemy. Olaf was triumphant; the wound he had given showed him he was still Eric's superior.

"Aha!" he cried, "I'll soon have you! I'll cut you in two. Dog of a traitor! I'll show you how die those who are false to Dan!"

"I am here to fight, not talk," said Eric, sturdily, and then he closed his lips again, resolved to lose no breath.

He needed it all. Olaf fought as he had never fought before. His blows were like those of a blacksmith, and he showered them upon the sword of his lighter antagonist thick and fast. He drove him steadily backward, though Eric managed to move in a half-circle which kept him always partially between Victoria and her foe.

The fight proved stubborn and protracted, though it seemed only a question of how long Eric could hold out. He was bleeding from three or four wounds, and his strength was slipping away. It was hard to bring a pallor to his bronzed cheeks, yet there it was, and his eyes had a new expression, as though he was living on his nervous force.

Olaf saw all this, and he redoubled his efforts and pressed him hotly, while with a furious blow he beat him to his knee.

"I have you now! I have you now!" he shouted, following up his advantage sharply.

Wife Number One uttered a cry of horror. The last moment of her brave champion seemed come.

But the end was not yet. Resting on one knee, with the blood dripping from half a dozen wounds, he still fought on, and the light in his

eyes was as resolute as ever. He had known from the first that he had taken a desperate chance, and he was not surprised.

"Devils alive!" shouted Olaf, "I will cut your throat for you!"

And he made another lunge.

Once more Eric successfully parried, but he knew the end was near at hand. His head was whirling dizzily, while his strength was ebbing away to nothing. He could oppose Olaf but a short time longer. And then?

The thought gave him a sort of desperate energy, and he collected all his power for a last effort. Once more he parried the would-be butcher's thrust, and then, in turn, he lunged forward with all his strength.

A truer stroke was never sped; the sword disappeared partially in Olaf's broad breast, and, when the giant staggered back with a stifled cry, a great stream of crimson gushed out over his garments.

But he saw it not.

The sword had dropped from his broad hand; he was staggering like a drunken man. Then followed a crash, and Olaf lay on the sand, feebly gasping. Once he made a motion to rise, but his life-blood was dyeing the sand, and he fell back, gasping, and was dead.

Eric seemed but little better. He, too, had fallen, and side by side the late foemen lay and bled together.

Wife Number One started up and forward. She knew that her champion needed immediate care, but her hands were bound behind her. She called on him to free them, but her words fell on deaf ears. Then she grasped his fallen sword, which was red with Olaf's life-blood, and managed to accomplish the work herself.

Next, she took his head in her lap—a movement of which he seemed unconscious—and began her work as a surgeon. Her means were limited, but water and wine were there, and she improvised bandages and lint, and after some time his wounds were properly cared for, the flow of blood stopped, and all danger of immediate collapse over.

But he seemed weak, very weak, and it was not until her work was nearly done that he gave any sign that he was conscious of what was transpiring around him.

Then she saw his gaze fixed upon her with an air of comprehension and clearness.

"You've brought me through," he said, faintly.

"Thank God that I have. You risked your life for me nobly, heroically, grandly, and nothing that I can do for you will be too much. Are you comfortable? Can I do more?"

He smiled, as a veteran soldier might smile, and answered, more steadily than before:

"Nothing more, except to give me a drink of wine. I'll soon pull out of it, never fear. I have lost a good bit of blood, but all I need is a bit of rest."

"Your enemy is dead."

"Olaf? Well, it wasn't my fault. He brought it on himself. You heard our talk. I couldn't see you killed as he had planned, even though Elder Lockdale ordered it. Lockdale! I reckon I am through with him," the man slowly added.

"Are you sorry?"

He hesitated for a moment.

"There was a glamour about the life, a strange fascination, but I don't doubt but I'm better out of it."

"You are!" Victoria declared, "for you are an honest and worthy man—a man with a heart. Think no more of him. There is a better life ahead of you if you will have it so, and I will pay you as much as Lockdale ever did if you will enter my service instead of his. As for the cause, I fight for just vengeance."

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE HOLE IN THE WALL.

WHEN Barwolf brought Wallace Brooke's party back to Paradise Gulch, the male members thereof were promptly confined where there seemed little likelihood of their making their escape. Some were placed in one room and others elsewhere, but it was upon Roger Hobart that the greatest amount of care was used.

All the Mormons seemed to recognize in him the man who was most to be feared of all, and he was conducted to a subterranean room of regular dungeon characteristics. Nor was this all. Since it was shown that people could go and come mysteriously about the premises, a feeling of insecurity had taken possession of the Danites, and even the strength of the dungeon was doubted.

Consequently, when Hobart had been thus confined, two men were stationed in the smaller room outside, as guards. The dungeon was lighted by a lamp of fair power, and a niche beside the door enabled the guards to look in whenever they saw fit without entering.

Here he passed the hours which followed the return to Paradise Gulch. He saw no one but his guards, and they made no talk with him. His food was passed in through the niche, and he had enough of it, but he was far from being reconciled to his captivity.

At all times, however, his chief worry was about Edna. God help the girl! where was she then? He had seen her brought back to the house; back to the home of the villain who aspired to add her to the lights of his harem. Since then, he knew not what had happened, but even in his dreams he saw her in trouble.

He was a restless prisoner. The guards outside grew tired of the tramping along the hard floor which broke in on their peaceful employment at all hours of the day and night. He slept, it is true, but day and night were the same to him there, and he awoke from fitful slumber with a restless feeling which soon put him on his feet again.

Back and forth, back and forth he paced, but the restlessness would not be driven away. How could it be when he did not know how the hours were passing to Edna?

Once, he fell into a sleep which was as short as its immediate predecessors had been. When he awoke he remained quiet and lay staring moodily at his light, which was burning low.

He was thus engaged when there was a slight rattling sound at one side of his dungeon, and he glanced that way, shrugged his shoulders and indifferently thought that a rat had intruded on his solitude. Had the rat gone further, and mounted to his miserable bed, he would have been equally indifferent.

Suddenly his mood changed, however. It had occurred to him that if a rat was there it indicated a hole in the wall, and a hole there might indicate a weakness of the wall.

Full of the idea, he slipped down from the bed and approached the suspected corner, lamp in hand. A low, scraping noise was audible, as though the rodent was still gnawing, but it now appeared to be outside the cell.

Roger held up the light and looked closely. He saw a small space between the rocks, while at his feet lay a few crumbles of mortar.

It was loosened chinking.

He was about to test the strength of the wall, as well as he could, when a peculiarity about the rat's working attracted his attention. It had a surprising regularity, while the noise was more like that a mason would produce in tearing down a wall.

Hobart grew interested and watched narrowly. After a few minutes he replaced his lamp on the table, stole near the door and looked at the guards, who were playing cards in their own den, and then back to the hole in the wall.

Did, or did it not, promise anything for him?

Hal a stone stirred—stopped—trembled—stopped and moved again. He could almost have sworn a crowbar was twisting it back and forth, cautiously, it is true, for caution was there necessary.

He placed his stool under the spot and brought his face to the level, and, almost as he did so, the stone receded and left a space through which came a puff of damp air. He set his teeth and awaited the next move in the affair, nor was he long kept in suspense.

A human face appeared on the other side, and he and another person looked straight into each other's eyes.

Dead silence followed, but Roger was too much in earnest to let the possible chance slip.

"In Heaven's name, who are you?" he demanded, in a quick, but cautious, whisper.

"Who are you?" was the unsatisfactory reply.

"A prisoner in this modern Bastille, and if you are an enemy of the Mormons, as I suspect, I beg that you will aid me to escape."

"What is your name?"

"Roger Hobart."

Something like a chuckle sounded from the unknown.

"I thought so."

"You did? And who are you?"

"Don't you recognize me?"

"No. Your voice sounds hollow and unnatural."

"Have you forgotten Deaf Duke?"

"No. What of him?"

"I am he."

"You?"

"Yes."

"But you seem to hear and speak all right now."

"Doctor Quack's Cure-all has cured me, and I hear and speak again," said the other man, with a low laugh. "Hobart, I have been digging for you, but this wall is infernally thick. Go back and keep watch, and in another hour I trust that I'll have you out all right."

"Use great caution," said Roger, somewhat nervously. "I discovered your operations by means of mortar that fell to the floor, and my guards, who are but a few yards away, may hear the same sound. Use all possible care. Have you a weapon for me?"

"Yes, here's a revolver. Take it, but don't fire unless the case is one of imperative necessity. An earthquake is gathering force which bids fair to envelop Elder Lockdale's house within it, but the mine must not be prematurely sprung or all will fail. Be cautious, yourself."

Roger promised, and then it was arranged that while Deaf Duke, as the stranger claimed to be, worked on the wall, the prisoner should

stand where he could watch the guards. In case of sudden danger, he was to shout, ostensibly to them, really, to warn his ally.

The first part of this plan was carried out, and by the door Roger stood impatiently while the "rat" resumed his gnawing.

Another interruption was close at hand, however, and Hobart started as he saw Asa Lockdale enter the room where the guards were seated. He had barely time to warn his ally, and then the key clicked in the lock and the elder came in, one of the guards keeping close beside him.

"Well, well!" he said, curtly, after a good look at the prisoner. "You are here, are you?"

"I'm nowhere else," Roger answered, without wasting any smooth words upon him.

"How do you like captivity?"

"As well as it deserves."

"Oh! you're inclined to be philosophic, are you? Well, pursue your road as far as it runs. I have come on business. To-night is my wedding night."

"Ah!"

Hobart could not avoid a start.

"Who do you suppose is to be my bride?"

"I don't know."

"Her name is Edna Brooke."

Roger's breath came quickly, and the cords along his half-bared arms swelled as he clinched his hands tightly. He had the will to rush upon this human vampire and strangle him where he stood, and it is not certain that he would not have done it had the Danite been away.

"You say nothing," pursued the elder, after a pause, looking curiously at his prisoner.

"What would you have me say?"

"I would have you wish me joy. Once we were rivals, but, I feel sure, you are generous enough to bury all resentment, since dear Edna will be so happy, and give me your good wishes on this, my wedding night!"

Lockdale spoke with the gayety of a youth of twenty-one years, and he seemed about to take his first, rather than his higher-numbered wife.

Hobart understood that he was trying to wound him as deeply as he could, and his lips curled scornfully.

"If you think all this, give me a chance to attend your wedding, free from all bonds. Otherwise, remain silent."

"Suppose I gave you that chance?"

"Then I would make the occasion your death-scene!" said the younger man, with fierce emphasis.

The elder laughed and rubbed his hands together.

"No such chance will be given you," he said, coolly. "I usually choose the guests at my weddings. You can remain here and chew the cud of meditation while I make the fair Edna mine forever—Mrs. Asa Lockdale."

Hobart's hand rested on the butt of his concealed revolver. It was a great temptation. One touch of his finger and Paradise Gulch would be without its leader; Utah would be freed from her worst curse. But he remembered the hole in the wall and curbed his anger. If once he could gain his freedom, a more complete victory could be gained, he hoped.

"Only for a flaw she would already be my wife," Asa continued, eying his victim closely, as a cat watches the writhings of a helpless mouse. "We stood together, side by side, prepared for the solemn ceremony, but Edna fainted, necessitating a postponement. Such drawbacks as that are liable to occur on all happy occasions, you know."

Hobart half-drew his revolver. Edna must have been worried and abused beyond endurance to reach the point of fainting. One shot at this mocking fiend and the debt would be paid. Should he fire?

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

DEAF DUKE WORKS WELL.

FOR awhile Asa Lockdale's life hung on a single thread, as it were, but, luckily for him, he had to deal with a man who knew the value of curbing his temper, and knew how to do it.

"Is that all you have to say?" Roger asked, actually forcing a smile to his face.

"Isn't that enough?" the elder demanded, plainly annoyed at producing so little impression.

"I don't see that what you say amounts to anything," coolly returned the prisoner, as he sat down and elevated his heels to the table. "As long as I am penned up here in this fashion, it is of but little consequence to me how goes the marrying world. Use your discretion, elder, but don't trouble me further."

"Play the stoic if you will," said Lockdale, viciously, "but I know the iron sinks deep in the flesh, for all of that. You love Edna Brooke, and you would give anything except your life to help her. Yet, it will avail you nothing. To-night she becomes my bride, and, after that, I think your fancy will cool."

His face was that of a demon as he spoke, but Hobart had set a restraint upon himself which would give way at nothing. He remained outwardly calm, but he remembered Deaf Duke and resolved that if he gained his liberty the

night should be a tragic one for the Mormon elder. He was being goaded past endurance, and the meanest of creatures will turn at bay when hard pressed.

Lockdale did not remain much longer. He had come to taunt the prisoner and let him know what he intended to do, and though he had not had the satisfaction of seeing him cringe and play the coward, he knew, as he had said, that the iron was deep in the flesh.

Hobart was once more alone, but he was no longer calm. The elder's visit had thrown him into a fever, and he dragged his stool under the hole in the wall with more haste than caution.

"Are you there?" he asked.

"Yes, and ready to resume digging," was the reply from the unseen ally.

"Make haste, for the Lord's sake! Did you hear what Lockdale said?"

"All."

"I must get out of here at once. Dig, man, dig! Give me a crowbar, or blow up the wall; anything, so long as you get me out."

"Be calm," said Deaf Duke, reassuringly. "The danger to the girl is not imminent, for this is Lockdale's supper time, and he will remain over an hour at the table. In the mean while, I'll remove this stone, which already trembles, and you can walk out. Be of good cheer!"

"Make haste!" urged Hobart. "This inactivity is torture. Work on!—work on!"

His ally returned an encouraging reply, and then resumed work, and the prisoner saw a large stone tremble as he worked upon it. If it could be removed, an important step toward escape would have been taken.

Roger had not exaggerated when he said it was torture to remain there in suspense. He paced his cell restlessly, and, as noisy laughter arose from the Danite guards in the next room, scowled like a pirate. Could he have passed the door of his cell, it is not sure but he would have used his revolver upon them both.

Luckily, he did nothing rash, and Deaf Duke worked on with such zeal that the stone in the wall grew looser and still looser, until he finally succeeded in pulling it back, and Roger's way of escape was open.

It is needless to say that he did not delay leaving the cell. Aided by Duke's strong arm, he clambered up the wall and through the opening his ally had made.

The first step toward escape had been taken.

Roger found himself in a narrow passage which had plainly not been intended for use by the architect. It was merely a little space left over when the dungeon was built, and loose earth and stones covered it in confusion.

"Welcome!" said Deaf Duke, giving the escaped prisoner his hand.

Roger looked at him keenly. The time was come when he felt it necessary to know who the man was. Once before he had pretended to be a deaf-mute. Now, all his faculties seemed in good condition. On the prairie, too, his conduct had been so peculiar that Hobart had believed him a traitor. Now, he appeared as a rescuer. What was to be made of him?

"I don't recognize you," said Roger, quietly.

"I am Deaf Duke."

"What else?"

"Nothing."

"You may as well drop your role. It is rather thin. When deaf men hear, and dumb men speak, it is time they were looked after. You are more than you seem, and there is a familiar look about your eyes, despite what you have done to hide it. Do I really know you? If so, what is your name?"

The man laid his hand on Roger's arm.

"Stranger," he said, "the wisest men in the world are those who know the least. Just let me go my length for now, and if it's the will of fortune, I'll unmask anon. Let us drop the subject now, and go to those who need help. I mean Edna, and the others."

"Where are they?"

"Prisoners, still."

"Of course, of course; but which way?"

"Follow me, and you shall see."

"They are all still well and—safe?"

"Ay, all of them. Wallace Brooke and Abijah Miffin are in one room; Edna and Lilian in a second; and Percy in a third. The girls came very near being married a few hours ago. They were deceived by a trick, but Edna swooned just at the crisis, and the danger was escaped for the time."

"What are the chances of rescuing them?"

"Very good. I have allies who are busy, even now, and I expect to meet the whole party near here. Be of good cheer, and, above all, be calm."

The caution was not given without cause. Hobart could retain nerve when danger menaced himself, alone, but he thought of Edna and his own power seemed insignificant as he threaded the subterranean way.

He was not kept in suspense a great while, however, for they emerged into a sort of cellar and, as the blaze of another light appeared in front of them, they saw other people.

Edna, Lilian, Abijah Miffin, Wallace and Percy Brooke were there.

Hobart pressed forward and warmly greeted his friends, but, had any one been looking at "Deaf" Duke, they would have seen him start as his gaze fell upon Percy, while a look of deep dissatisfaction crossed his face. He said nothing, however, and Wallace soon came to his side.

"God bless you for what you have done," he said. "I feel stronger now Hobart is here. But where are your allies?"

"They are busy, elsewhere," Duke replied. "But what of your son?—I did not expect to see him here."

"I happened on the room where he was confined, while I was obeying your directions and liberating my daughter and Lilian. It was a lucky chance; an odd chance, too, since you did not know where he was. But I found him, and we are now all united again. It only remains for you to lead us to the outer world."

"That's the figger," said Abijah Miffin. "Time is fleetin' us away to the dim futur', an' I guess the sooner we shake this dust off from our shews, the better 'twill be fur us. Amble on, good people!"

No one was anxious to remain longer; at least no one expressed a desire to that effect. All knew that the Mormons would not long remain in inactivity, and when Lockdale set the wheels once more in motion, the car was liable to roll on and crush them if they were in the place.

Duke took the lead and the others followed, and he led them along strange and unfrequented paths. Shapeless passages lay all around, many half-blocked by earth and loose stones. They did not then know how to account for them, but mature thought sufficed to suggest the theory that the elder's house was built on, and nearly over, the ruins of some old building, the owners of which had gone to their last homes scores of years before.

After a few minutes Duke paused.

"We are now about to go through a passage which we must thread in darkness and silence. A light would betray us to a Danite guard just beyond; sound would have the same effect. The way is neither good nor bad, but with care, we can tread it all right. Keep close to me and have no fear."

"Lead on, General Jackson," said the man from Peach Trees. "We ain't the kind tew show the white feather in sech cases, be we, gals?"

"I hope not," said Lilian, bravely.

"O' course we ain't. Roger, is yew'rshutein' iron all ready fur exercise?"

"Yes."

"Lead on then, Deefy, an' be sure yew dew the job well. This hyar is runnin' the block-ade."

Duke had been waiting with evident impatience for him to end, and at this direction he promptly moved. The light was extinguished and they entered the passage he had mentioned. It was a damp and gloomy one, and with the darkness about them, even the men were affected, but no mishap befell them.

Once Hobart, who was at the rear, thought he heard voices and footsteps behind them, but when he paused for a moment the sound was no longer audible, and he abandoned the idea.

They passed on and soon reached a point where the guide informed them that immediate danger was over, and the light was again started.

"We shall shortly reach a place of exit," the guide added. "Be of good cheer, and we will not be found ashore when the ship sails. One thing is imperatively necessary, hower; a lapse from extreme caution would undo all I have done and deliver us again into the hands of the Danites."

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE SUSPENDED SWORD FALLS.

NEARLY all the fugitives were momentarily placing increased confidence in Deaf Duke, but it was noticeable that he gave all his attention to subjects of importance, and wasted none on trifles. The danger was not yet past.

Edna and Lilian were walking side by side, and the former spoke twice before she received an answer.

"What is the matter?" she asked, when Lilian's attention was finally arrested.

"Nothing," Miss Allen replied.

"Then why are you so absent-minded?"

"I have an idea," Lilian confessed, after a pause.

"What is it?"

"That I can't tell you now. You would say it was wild and absurd, and I am not sure but it is both. Yet—yet, I feel sure of my position. Don't ask me to explain what I mean. When we are out of this place I shall settle a question which is in my mind; then you shall know the result."

Edna laid her hand on her cousin's arm.

"You speak more hopefully than you have done before since Locke Kellogg disappeared. Can it be—"

"Ask no questions," said Lilian. "Be content to await the verdict; there is, at present, only theory."

Edna let the matter drop, but she was still of the opinion that something had occurred to in-

crease Lilian's hopes for the future. The disappearance of Kellogg had been a severe blow to the usually buoyant-spirited girl, but her voice had the old ring once more.

But Edna's thoughts were soon turned into another channel.

Deaf Duke, who had never allowed his eyes to be idle, wheeled, strode back a few paces and caught Percy Brooke's arm in a crushing hold.

"What would you do?" he sharply asked.

"Nothing," faltered Percy. "What do you mean?"

"Why are you scattering bits of your handkerchief by the way?"

"I am not—you are mistaken; I did not intend any harm!" said the miserable wretch, rolling his eyes wildly from point to point.

"Liar!" said Duke, fiercely. "You are a traitor to this party, and you are trying to betray us now as you have betrayed your best friends before. Ungrateful dog! do you hear me? I say you are a traitor! Nothing but the blindness of those who foolishly cared for you has covered your trail thus far, for you left tracks plain to all. Roger Hobart, I give him in your charge a moment while I go on the back-track. There, not two yards away, you can see a bit of handkerchief on the ground. It was torn off by Percy Brooke and left so that the Danites could trace us. I will secure a second piece. Wait here for me, and let no man dare stir."

The guide had spoken fiercely, and at the last word he departed at a run. Those left behind looked at each other in bewilderment and incredulity, and then at Percy.

That person, pale and trembling, broke into frantic declarations of faithfulness, but with a charge at last plainly known, even the father who had for long years been his best friend was driven to doubt.

"This is no time for trial or verdict, Percy," he said, "but I pray that your innocence may be established. I would not have a Brooke so base."

"But, merciful Heaven," said the son, feverishly, "what motive could I have?"

"I'll answer that," said the voice of Duke, and he suddenly reappeared. "See! Here are two pieces of the torn handkerchief, and, of course, there are more beyond. Fool!" to Percy, "will you never learn to keep far away from Lockdale and trust him not? How many times do you need evidence of his double-dealing? He has repeatedly made a cat's-paw of you, and each time he tries, he succeeds."

"But what motive could Percy have for betraying us?" asked Wallace Brooke, trying to pluck up faith in his eldest-born.

"What motive?" cried Deaf Duke. "Are you, then, all blind? He loves his cousin, Lilian Allen, and, for her, he has sinned repeatedly. Lockdale offered him the girl if he would betray you and your party into the Mormons' hands, and this hopeful gallows-bird has done his best."

The speaker pointed an accusing finger at Percy, who was ghastly pale, but further speech on the subject was ended by the rush of other feet and, in a moment, the devoted band found themselves hemmed in by Barwolf and his men, while a dozen rifles covered them and the stern voice of the centurion arose commanding them to surrender.

He had to deal with men not of the weakling kind—Hobart, Miffin and Duke—but there were not two ways for a choice. To save their lives they must surrender.

It was a bitter necessity, but they yielded to the inevitable and their weapons were passed over one by one until they came to Percy.

"I claim the right to retain my weapons," said he.

He had resolved to throw off the mask, at last, and to assert his rights, or what he considered his rights. Even Edna and his father looked at him with suspicion, and he knew he could no longer pose as an honest man.

"What right have you to them?" Barwolf scornfully asked.

"Didn't I scatter bits of my handkerchief to guide you in your pursuit?"

"Ay," the centurion replied, "but no one asked you to do so. The more fool you! You have outlived your usefulness. Dan wants no more of you, and I think the world would be better off to get rid of such a cur. You will surrender your weapons at once."

"Never!" cried Percy, his eyes like those of a madman.

"Then I shall take them from you," sturdily replied the centurion.

"I demand to be taken before Elder Lockdale as I am, and—"

"The elder has refused to see you again. The sight of your face troubles his eyes. Come, my man, be sensible. We have made a cat's-paw of you, and used you all we cared to do, and now we are done. Surrender your weapons at once, or I'll take them away and spit you like a Christmas turkey."

There was bluff common-sense in what he did, but Percy was so enraged at the thought that his latest idiotic scheme for Mormon favor had come to nothing, that he lost all prudence.

He turned his revolver upon Barwolf, but the latter made one stroke with his heavy sword

and the revolver went flying away, and then he brought the flat of the blade down on Percy's head with a force which dashed him half-stunned to the floor.

Asa Lockdale was in his private room, but he was not alone. Prime-minister Hughson, and Harrod, the spy, were there, and the three were busy over choice wine which the elder had ordered for the occasion.

Perhaps it was the wine, or the triumph, or both combined, but Lockdale and Hughson were noisily happy, and a good deal of doubtful "wit" was mixed with the conversation.

Harrod attempted none. Somber as ever, he sat back in his chair and watched the others, and bowed lowly to Asa, and prated of the Sons of Dan, and the worshipers of fire and light, and was the thorough fanatic, as usual.

There seemed good reason why the men should rejoice. All was working as well as they could expect, and two of them expected to take to themselves pretty wives within the hour.

At times there were thoughts of Heavy Hand which percolated through their minds, but they turned to gayer thoughts and scenes.

"My master," said Harrod, at last, "it is now five minutes of ten."

"So it is," said Lockdale, "and it was at ten that Barwolf was to bring the male prisoners here. Ha! there is a sound outside the door; they are coming now. Will you open the door, Hughson?"

The prime minister obeyed, and in marched Barwolf and several of his men, bringing as prisoners, Hobart, Miffin, the Brookes, father and son, and Duke.

Percy Brooke's head was bandaged, his face was pale and he looked miserable.

Lockdale's evil eyes were twinkling with triumph, and he first dashed off another glass of wine and then laughed aloud.

"You are a pretty looking lot," he said, coarsely, "and I am reminded of the story of the sportsman who claimed that he strung four-and-twenty black-birds on his ramrod. Well, you're all in the same boat, and I will soon wind up your hobbins."

"Asa Lockdale," said Brooke, sternly, "why will you persist in this infamous work?"

"Why? Well, I acknowledge the right of no man to question me in Paradise Gulch, but I will answer, since you are so anxious. When you came to the city I have made, you placed yourself at my command. When I asked for your daughter, you did not obey. You evaded a direct answer and tried to run away from me. This is the result. You are now under the ban of Dan, and I have called you here to say that you are all to die. I give you just five hours for preparation."

"How dare you?" Brooke said, more indignation than fear in his voice.

"How dare I? Ha! ha! what is there that I dare not do in Paradise Gulch, or in all broad Utah, for that matter?"

"It strikes me your Danites are not so numerous as they were," interrupted Duke, sarcastically, looking at Barwolf's followers.

The elder would have answered, but the centurion flushed through all his bronze, and, striding to Duke's side, he angrily exclaimed:

"Don't fly too high, my man. You think you are bound so tightly in mystery that your secret is safe, but I have at last penetrated it. Men, take this fellow aside and give him a thorough washing. Get rid of the counterfeit tan on his skin, do away with his wig and false beard, and then bring him back."

Duke was hustled away with a celerity which gave him no chance to say more. Hobart and Wallace Brooke looked at each other in questioning wonder. What development was coming? They were willing to believe the centurion's statement that there was a mystery about "Deaf" Duke, but they doubted if Lockdale or Hughson knew what it was.

The mystery was soon explained. Duke was dragged back, a good deal changed outwardly, and Wallace Brooke started and exclaimed:

"Locke Kellogg!"

"Ay, Locke Kellogg it is," said Barwolf, "and it stands Kellogg in hand to tell us how he escaped from the sword-armed well. There is some traitor among the Sons of Dan, and I will give half my fortune to find him. What say you, Elder Lockdale, shall Kellogg have his liberty if he tells the whole truth?"

The elder, greatly surprised by the discovery, managed to mutter an affirmative answer, but Duke, otherwise Kellogg, laughed scornfully.

"Build your own house," he said; "not a word will I tell!"

CHAPTER XL.

RUN DOWN.

BARWOLF struck his hand upon his hip with a force which made his sword rattle in its scabbard.

"Refuse, and, by my life, I'll put you to tortures which shall unclothe your lips. I will know the truth. Matters have gone ill with the Danites of late. A creature we call Heavy Hand has preyed upon us, and, as you have boasted,

the original Danites are becoming few. I say we have a traitor among us, and you shall tell who he is if I have to tear you limb from limb to do it!"

Locke Kellogg, as we will now call "Deaf Duke," smiled coldly, and turned to Lockdale.

"Will you uphold your men in such brutal threats?" he calmly asked.

"I will; I do!" the elder declared.

"Just as you say, but it will take bigger men than there are among your crowd to accomplish the work you have mapped out. I shall tell nothing that I know."

"Beware!" the centurion cried, clanging his sword again.

"Pardon me if I decline to be alarmed," Kellogg answered, still unmoved.

"Speak, or I will take you out and put you to the torture at once."

"Wait!" said Lockdale, with an oily smile.

"I think the torture may be begun right here. Kellogg is the lover of Lillian Allen; Hobart is the lover of Edna Brooke. Let the girls be brought in while the gallants are here, and at once be married to Hughson and myself. Go, Barwolf, and bring them!"

Both Hughson and the centurion seemed pleased with the idea, and the latter strode away. Abijah Miffin looked at Lockdale furiously and wrestled with his bonds vainly.

"You gosh-darned old skunk!" he cried, addressing the elder, "if I had you in the holler o' my hand I'd lam you like tarnation; I would, by the big horn spoon. Yew'r'tew mean tew eat swamp-grass!"

Kellogg had been trying to get the attention of the man from Peach Trees, and, as he succeeded, Abijah suddenly grew mute. Roger Hobart addressed Lillian's lover.

"You keep up good heart outwardly," he said, in a low tone. "Have you any real ground for hope?"

Locke would have answered, but one of the Danites roughly separated them.

Seeing that all were awaiting the centurion's return, Wallace Brooke made a last appeal to the elder. We need scarcely say it was useless. Then Brooke subsided into gloomy thought. Percy stood pale and silent, his gaze bent on the floor. Now and then his lips moved, but he no longer seemed conscious of what was transpiring around him. Had the others been less busy, they might have found time to wonder if the blow from Barwolf's sword had done serious harm to his head.

The wait for Barwolf grew protracted, and the elder finally sent another Danite to look for the chief. The man went, and moved toward where he knew Edna and Lillian were confined.

He was moving along the passage when he suddenly came across a dark figure lying on the floor. It was the body of a man. The face was concealed by one arm, which lay across it, but Theseus had a sudden suspicion and pressed forward.

He removed the arm, and the dead man's face was revealed.

It was that of Barwolf.

The centurion had finished one life.

"Heavy Hand!"

The words fell from Theseus's ashen lips huskily, and he looked fearfully around. Only for a brief time was he reduced to inactivity. Bending forward he pulled the dead centurion's shirt away from his breast. A small, deep stab-wound was revealed.

"Ay, 'tis the mark of Heavy Hand!" muttered the Danite. "I must hasten to the elder and report the death of our gracious chief."

He was turning away when a voice pronounced his name sharply. He turned and saw Harrod, who was accompanied by Edna and Lillian.

"Where are you going?" the spy continued.

"To the elder, to tell of this dread deed."

Theseus pointed to Barwolf's body.

"Bah! that is nothing!" Harrod returned.

"Heavy Hand has merely claimed another victim. What of it? True, our dear master, the elder, loses a follower, but another of the Sons of Dan have gone home to the god of fire and light. Barwolf is in paradise. Do you ask more? Come, let us go to Lockdale!"

Harrod had never been in a more somber mood. He passed Theseus as he spoke, still conducting Edna and Lillian, and the minor Danite fell into the rear.

All went to the elder's room, where he hailed them joyfully.

"Welcome, maidens!" he said, loudly. "You are late, but we will overlook it this time. I want nothing but smiles on your faces, for this is to be our wedding hour. Harrod, where is Barwolf?"

"Dead!" was the unmoved reply.

"Dead?" Lockdale echoed.

"Ay!"

"What do you mean?"

"Heavy Hand has scored another victim. Barwolf has gone to join Rudolph, Alaric, Ruric, Olaf, Hassan, Alexis, and the other brothers; he has gone to the land of heat and light—the Danite paradise. There, where all are happy and joyful, Barwolf will again be a chief."

Harrod had clasped his hands, and with his eyes turned upward, spoke with his usual somber force. But the elder burst forth fiercely:

"In the fiend's name, what does this mean? Barwolf dead, and struck down in our own house? By my life, this slayer shall be found. Ho! scatter, all; and I'll make the man rich who first lays hands on Heavy Hand. Go!"

"Wait!" said Harrod, unmoved.

"Well? Make haste!"

"There is some one here who wishes to see you. Enter!"

The last word was spoken in a raised voice, and as it sounded the door moved, and a newcomer appeared.

It was Victoria, wife Number One!

Dead silence fell over the people in the room, and Lockdale gazed as though stricken dumb at the woman. Only Harrod retained his coolness. His lips were parted in a smile which revealed his carnivorous teeth.

But the elder finally aroused.

"Ho!" he cried, "seize that woman! Harrod, take her and throw her in the deepest dungeon we have—nay, delay is dangerous; put her to death at once."

Harrod folded his arms composedly.

"No!" he said.

"What?"

"I said, No!"

"What do you mean?"

"Simply that you are no longer ruler of Paradise Gulch, King Lockdale!" the spy cried, in a keener voice than any one there had ever before heard him use. "Without, there, we are ready!"

Again the door was opened, and several men entered. They were the foremost citizens of the town; men who had stood next to the elder in power. One of them went to the front at once.

"Asa Lockdale," said one, sternly, "you may, perhaps, be able to understand what this means. We have rebelled against your authority, because we are convinced that you are an evil man. From to-day we will obey no order of yours, and, if you seek to control us, you will be driven from the town. Practically, we outlaw you as it is, but if you will be content to lead a quiet, secluded life, one which will not disgrace us, you may remain, since you have property here."

Had the heavens fallen, Lockdale would not have been more astonished. He had thought he had a firm hold on all who lived in his city, but he was suddenly shown that he had only his Danites. He raved and stormed, but his late assistants were firm.

He was a deposed ruler.

Nor was this all. Of the few Danites who remained, and they were few, all were ordered to leave Paradise Gulch forever; all except Harrod.

Baffled, fallen, disgraced, miserable and desperate, Lockdale looked at Harrod with blood-shot eyes.

"I owe all this to you!" he cried, a new light dawning upon him.

Harrod smiled.

"Asa Lockdale, you are right. You owe all to me. It was I who showed your people what you really were; it was I who saved wife Number One several times from death—"

"Demon! and you are Heavy Hand, too!" the elder hotly cried.

Harrod's face was dark and gloomy.

"I am not here to give particulars, but I will say that I once had a sister whom I loved as I loved my life. You met her; you lured her to your home; you made her one of your numerous 'wives,' she died in your dark house of crime. When I finally struck the trail after long search I found no definite news in regard to her, and I became a Danite to learn the truth. When I knew she was really dead, I remained with you to ruin you and to deprive you of all power. Have I not done it, Lockdale?"

The dethroned elder felt as though a fiend was standing before him, but he caught at one hope. Whether Harrod's revenge was just or not, if he was really the mysterious slayer he had made himself amenable to lawful vengeance.

"You are Heavy Hand!" he asserted, "and, as such, I demand your arrest and death!"

The spy smiled coldly.

"Be not hasty, elder," he said. "As a Danite I have never been very zealous. Yet I have played my part and prated of fire, light, the Danites' paradise, and some such rubbish. I have done what I could to foil your schemes. I saved wife Number One, and I saved Locke Kellogg when he was thrown in the well where the swords are. That place was my device, but is a mere sham; the swords are of no effect. You ask if I am Heavy Hand. Well, sir, I am the man who killed Rudolph, Barwolf, Alexis, Ruric and other Danites, and now I am ready to kill their master!"

At the last word the ex-Danite bounded forward like a flash and buried a knife in Lockdale's bosom. The man reeled back with a loud cry, and, before any one could interfere, Harrod was gone.

There was light in Paradise Gulch. Asa Lock-

dale was dead, and the direction of affairs was in the hands of men who intended to do what was right.

Our friends were reunited and happy. Hobart and Edna, and Kellogg and Lillian, renewed their lovers' dreams. And it came to pass that Abijah Miffin lingered much near the side of Victoria, *alias* Blanche Bird, otherwise the legal Mrs. Lockdale. There was no mystery about Abijah except that he had been working earnestly as Harrod's helper.

Roger Hobart was at last told that wife Number One was his sister, and the reunion was an affecting one. She was nearly prostrated for awhile, but her natural energies soon returned.

Of Harrod's work no one was fully informed, though Kellogg, Miffin and Victoria could tell a good deal. His policy had been secrecy and silence. He saved Kellogg from the sword-pit, and prevented him from revealing the fact that he was saved. The same remark may be applied to Victoria, after she was saved from Rudolph's assassin hand.

Harrod had been Heavy Hand, but his double-dealing had been consummate acting. None of the other Danites had ever suspected the truth. When he had joined Victoria to his fortunes, she sometimes appeared in scenes where Heavy Hand talked to men, especially when Hobart was conducted over Lockdale's house.

It was Harrod who first abducted Edna from her father's house. This was done because he knew she would otherwise fall into the elder's power.

When, on the desert, Percy Brooke tried to abduct Lillian, and was foiled by Harrod, who took both girls away, the spy was working for their good.

He knew Barwolf was nearly upon the party; that they were surrounded, and escape impossible. When the chance occurred, however, he tried to take the girls through. He failed, and then he hoodwinked Barwolf and continued the game as he thought best.

It was at his request that Kellogg, *alias* Deaf Duke, deserted the sleeping camp without warning. The spy was resolved not to have more confidants, and Kellogg had to yield or lose his aid.

When the party escaped from the city on horseback, it was Harrod who helped them through the guards posted by Barwolf. Had not Harrod changed some of them, they could never have gone through.

As it was, one struck the trail and fell in the grove at Heavy Hand's feet when Hobart heard the strange cry.

John Hughson tried flight, but was found just outside the town, dead. On his breast was a paper, on which was written these words:

"This is the last act of HEAVY HAND."

And Heavy Hand and Harrod disappeared from view. Where he went and where he is none of our friends can say, but they will long remember his strange, somber ways. Well did he play his part in Paradise Gulch, and by his acts, excusable or not, the place was freed from its greatest curses—Lockdale and Hughson.

Percy Brooke died from the blow inflicted by the centurion, and his faults and failings are hid under forgiving Mother Earth.

Wallace Brooke left Paradise Gulch and Utah. It was no longer a place he could endure.

Of course Edna became Mrs. Roger Hobart, and Lillian and Locke Kellogg joined their fortunes.

Wife Number One, *nee* Blanche Bird, was inclined to regard her life as a ruined one, but somehow honest Abijah Miffin prevailed upon her to change her views. And she acknowledged her subjugation by marrying him. They live at Peach Trees, and she is watching over her younger sister, casually mentioned in these pages, guarding her from Danite plotters.

Eric recovered from the wounds inflicted by Olaf, abandoned the Mormons and became an honorable and useful man. His heroic defense of Victoria will never be forgotten by her.

In Paradise Gulch the Danites no longer rule. They are gone, root and branch—Lockdale, the evil; centurion Barwolf and somber Harrod. And the last record of their career is the last record of our story.

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